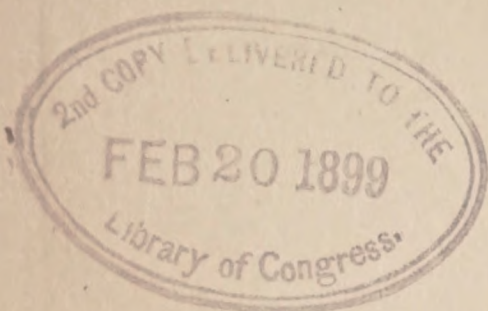




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KATHIE'S STORIES

By
Miss A. M. Douglas.



SUMMER AT CEDARWOOD.

LEE & SHEPARD
BOSTON.



KATHIE AND GYPSEY. Page 37.

KATHIE'S
SUMMER AT CEDARWOOD.

BY

AMANDA M. DOUGLAS,

AUTHOR OF "KATHIE'S THREE WISHES," "KATHIE'S AUNT RUTH," "KATHIE'S
SOLDIERS," "IN THE RANKS," "KATHIE'S HARVEST DAYS,"
"IN TRUST," ETC.

BOSTON:
LEE AND SHEPARD, PUBLISHERS.

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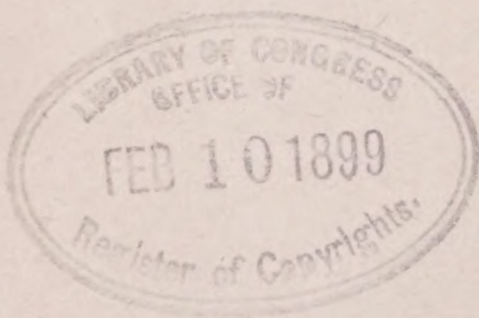
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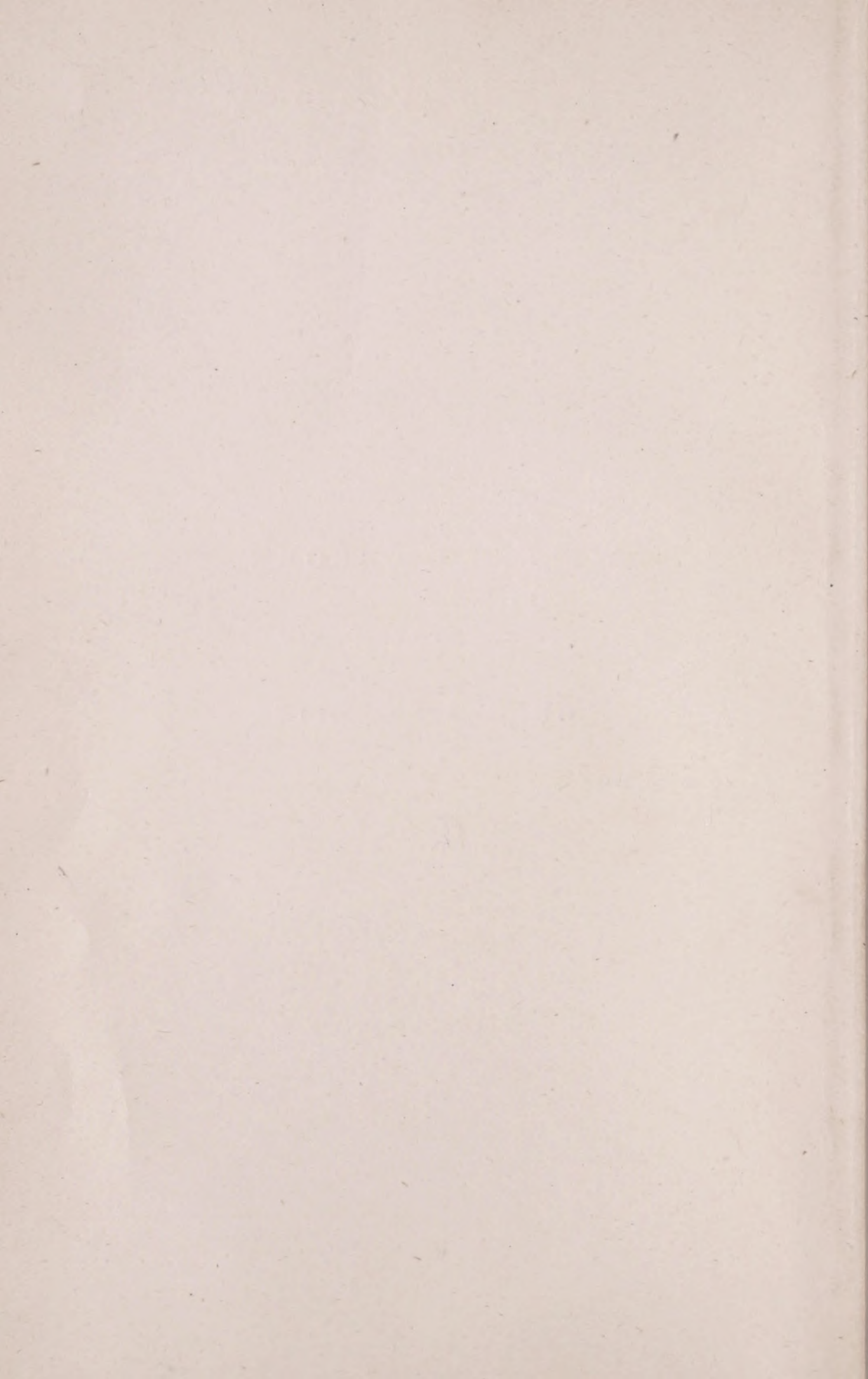
TO

WILLIE L. OSBORN,

AND HIS LITTLE SISTERS,

LOUISE AND GERTIE.

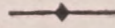
WOODSIDE, 1870.



Kathie Stories.

1. KATHIE'S THREE WISHES.
2. KATHIE'S AUNT RUTH.
3. KATHIE'S SUMMER AT CEDARWOOD.
4. KATHIE'S SOLDIERS.
5. IN THE RANKS.
6. KATHIE'S HARVEST DAYS.

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KATHIE'S SUMMER AT CEDARWOOD.

CHAPTER I.

HOME AGAIN.

IT seemed to Kathie Alston, after her long stay in the city, that Cedarwood was lovelier than ever. It was March too, a very dismal month for beauty, and I am afraid almost any one else would have thought it dreary when the sun shone on the leafless trees and over the frozen ground. But Kathie had a pair of magic spectacles through which everything looked bright, and then she was so glad to be at home once more.

She could hardly believe her eyes when she came down to breakfast. There was Aunt Ruth walking round with Freddy, to the child's great delight. And though Kathie was quite accustomed to seeing her go without her crutch at Dr. Markham's, it looked strange here.

"Is n't it odd?" exclaimed Rob, noticing Kathie's

surprise. "Why, it does n't look a bit like Aunt Ruth! I actually ran for her crutch this morning."

Kathie laughed and kissed her.

"Does n't it seem good to be at home once more, auntie? It is the next nicest thing to being well."

Hannah brought in the breakfast, and Uncle Robert made his appearance.

"Good morning, my little girl," he said.

"I believe I overslept myself," began Kathie. "I have been used to lying abed late, and so fallen into bad habits. Have you been up long, and what have you done?"

"Did you suppose that he had gone to garden-
ing?" asked Rob, mirthfully.

"Well, it will soon be time."

"We shall have half a dozen snow-storms yet."

"O, I can't believe it. Do you think we shall, Uncle Robert?"

"I dare say"; and there was a twinkle in his eye.

"Did you have a good time sleigh-riding, Rob?" Kathie asked.

"O, it was jolly! And the ponies liked it as much as anybody."

"The dear little fellows! I must go out and see them after breakfast."

"And my rabbits and guinea-pigs," put in Fred, pleadingly.

"O, and my bird!" exclaimed Kathie. "Where is it, Uncle Robert?"

"In Aunt Ruth's room."

"He has grown so cunning, Kathie," said Rob. "He will sit on your finger, and kiss you, and when he does n't like anything he will scold in the most comical manner."

"There are so many things to see that it will take me all day to get round"; and Kathie laughed.

"I wish it was Christmas and I could stay at home," said Rob. "There is so much to show you."

"I 'll have to be Kathie's guide," rejoined her uncle.

"For I feel very strange and I might get lost. It does n't seem hardly as if I had ever lived here. And yet what a lovely time we had last summer settling everything!"

It was growing quite late, and the boys had to start off to school, which they did rather regretfully. It was a great pleasure to have sunshiny little Kathie at home again. Rob really envied his uncle the delight of escorting her about.

She stood by the window watching them and nodding gayly. When they were out of sight she turned to Aunt Ruth.

"Do you feel quite well this morning?" she asked.

"Yes, only a little tired, and I shall soon recover from that. Indeed, I feel as if I might get fat and rosy now."

"I hope you will. Dear Aunt Ruth, it is so nice to have such a pretty home, and to see you well again."

For ever since Kathie could remember Aunt Ruth had been lame and an invalid. If Uncle Robert had not come home with a fortune, none of these nice things would have happened, and Kathie softly breathed a little prayer of thankfulness. She felt amply repaid for her long stay at Dr. Markham's, though she had missed home sadly. Since she had been a pleasure and a comfort to Aunt Ruth through that time of suffering, she was content and satisfied. It seemed now as if she had nothing to do but enjoy herself. Her heart was as light as a feather.

They went up stairs together. Aunt Ruth's room looked as if it might be summer. The bay-window was full of vines and flowers in bloom. Besides the ivy and the hanging-baskets, there were numberless

odd little things that caught Kathie's attention. One was a wineglass full of tall, beautiful grass. Standing on a tiny black-walnut bracket, it looked almost as if it was growing out of the wall. Kathie examined it more closely.

"Why," she said, "there 's something in the glass."

Uncle Robert laughed and answered, "A pine cone."

"How did you do it?" and she turned a curious face towards him.

"I sowed grass-seed thickly in the cone and then kept it upright in the water. The grass soon began to grow."

"Is n't it odd and beautiful, Aunt Ruth? And O, you have an aquarium!"

"That 's Rob's."

"Did he do it himself?"

"Partly. He was going to surprise you with it at Christmas; but as you did not come, he concluded to keep his secret. I wonder that he did not rush you up here this morning."

"O, see the gold-fish! How lovely they look diving about! And this calla has budded."

"Yes. Rob will soon have a blossom."

"And there's my darling Gypsy. You little pet, you don't know me at all!"

Gypsy turned up his round black eye in a most comical fashion, and pulled out his tuft of black feathers to make himself look as jaunty as possible.

"Gypsy!" said Uncle Robert.

"Peep! pe-e-p!" replied Gypsy, in the most musical of voices.

"Good morning to your highness!"

Gypsy nodded his head very sagely, and gave them half a dozen notes of a song, as if he were merely hinting what he might do if he chose.

"Would you like to come out?"

Down went Gypsy to the bottom of his cage, and his beady eyes were full of expectation. Uncle Robert opened the door.

With something that sounded like a shout of triumph, Gypsy winged his way across the room, and then back again to the flowers. Here he gave a long, exultant warble that nearly deafened them all. Kathie tried to approach him, but he was very shy about making friends.

"You have charmed him, Uncle Robert. I am

afraid he will never love me again," Kathie exclaimed, regretfully.

"I think he is a fellow of very decided preferences, but I have a fancy that he will return to his allegiance. Dogs and kittens always love you, Kathie," was her uncle's consolation.

"Mrs. Havens has such a beautiful large Maltese cat. His fur is short and soft as satin. He would not make friends with everybody, but the first time I stayed to tea he came and curled up in my lap."

"I think you understand the science of charming," returned Uncle Robert, with a laugh.

But on this occasion Gypsy was proof against it, and presently he went back to his abode. When Kathie put her finger to the wire of the cage he fluttered his wings and began to scold.

Leaving Aunt Ruth in her crimson easy-chair, Kathie and Uncle Robert began their tour. Of course the new piano must be inspected again. It was very beautiful by daylight and exceedingly fine in tone. Kathie ran her fingers over the keys with the utmost satisfaction.

"Why, it is as nice as Ada's," she said.

"Suppose it had not been?"

"I should have been delighted with it just the same. Only I *am* glad. Ada seems to believe that no one can have an article of any kind quite as good as hers."

"How did you and Ada get along? Did you make a very romantic friendship?" and there was an odd little look in the questioner's eye.

"What would a romantic friendship be like, Uncle Robert?"

He laughed, but Kathie was a trifle perplexed.

"Why, I suppose in such a case you would want to see her daily when you could, and write to her two or three times a week."

"Then it is n't at all romantic. I don't believe we shall write, though she is coming to make me a visit this summer."

There was no reply, and presently she said, "Do you think that I ought to have loved Ada more, Uncle Robert? Occasionally we had very nice times, but so often she would say something to make me uncomfortable. I really do love the Gardiner girls better, and Mary Cox, and ever so many others. And though Ada is a good deal like a woman in some respects, I am very much happier with Miss Jessie. Is it wrong?"

"No, my dear child. While I do not believe in any person's taking unreasonable fancies, I still think one's own heart is the surest guide. But you and Ada did not disagree?"

"We never quarrelled or disputed, if that is what you mean. Uncle Robert," hesitatingly, "I would like to tell you something."

"Well, my little dear," was the encouraging reply.

Kathie opened her heart about the Sunday evening. She told her story very simply, yet her uncle could see that she had not forgotten all the pain.

"I am glad that you had the courage to do right," he replied, gravely. "I should have been very sorry if I had heard of your singing songs for mere pleasure at such a time. Yet I know what a struggle it must have been."

"It was dreadful for me to say no, Uncle Robert. It looked so disobliging when the ladies had all been kind to me, and then Ada thought that it was because I did not want her to be praised. Mrs. Meredith was very much annoyed, and I'm afraid Mr. Edward Meredith did not believe at first that my motive was simply to do right."

"It is very painful to be misunderstood in such a

case, or to have others think that you are doing it simply for effect. There are many things in this world quite hard to bear, Kathie, but you know the Apostle said we were to take just such reproofs patiently, for it was no merit when we were buffeted for our faults. And I am glad my little girl was not tempted to give an angry or impatient reply. Did you tell Aunt Ruth ? ”

“ I could n't that night, you know, for the doctor had forbidden any talking at bedtime. I cried myself to sleep, I felt so badly, and wished that I could come home to you and mamma.”

“ Still that was not particularly Ada's fault. She was thoughtless about it, to be sure, but I hope you did not evince any displeasure toward her.”

Kathie smiled a little through the tears in her eyes, as she answered, “ I could not do anything but wait, for of course I had no chance to ask them to take me into favor, but I was very glad when they did.”

“ The Merediths are very worldly people. They are ~~not~~ striving to lead holy lives, so we cannot blame them quite as much as those of greater pretensions. Your mamma was rather alarmed at first about Ada's influence, but I knew that you could ~~not~~ go through

life without some temptations. I think you have stood the ordeal very well."

"But, Uncle Robert, I sometimes feel as if I ought to have loved Ada. She was kind in a great many ways and liked to have me come. When she did not say things to trouble me we were real happy."

"What kind of things, Kathie?"

The child colored, for all she could think of just at that moment was the conversation about her Uncle and Miss Jessie. Many of the other little stings and thrusts had been too intangible to repeat.

Uncle Robert folded his hands about the crimson face and repeated his question.

"There was one subject that Aunt Ruth said was gossip," Kathie went on, slowly.

"If it is about the Merediths, you had better not repeat it," was his grave rejoinder.

"No, it was about you. Uncle Robert, I think I would rather tell you. It gave me such a heart-ache, and it was at the time when Aunt Ruth was so poorly, — before Christmas."

"But why did n't you confess your trouble when I was down? You know that was part of our bargain that we should share one another's burdens"

"I could n't then. I fancied that it might be true, and I did not want to appear selfish. But, O Uncle Robert, the pain was n't selfishness!"

"But I'm quite in the dark about it"; and he smiled.

"Ada said you were going to marry Miss Jessie, and that it would make a great difference; that you would not want us all here, nor love us as you did before. It made me very miserable, and I could not tell any one."

Uncle Robert gave a long, low whistle, and then a gay laugh.

"Upon my word, Miss Ada is a keen-eyed gossip. Did n't she have some assistance in the matter?"

"She heard her mother talking about it, I believe."

Uncle Robert studied Kathie's face. It was the very embodiment of guileless innocence. She certainly had not been indiscreetly airing her limited knowledge.

"Well, what did you say to it?" he asked, in a peculiar tone, rather annoyed that Miss Jessie's name should have been thus dragged into notice by comparative strangers.

"O, I could n't believe it. I told Ada that we

should all love each other, if you did send us away "; and Kathie hid her face on Uncle Robert's shoulder.

"My darling, I should *not* send you away. How did she come to fancy that?"

"But the fortune is yours, and we would not have any right to it," she said, slowly.

"Ada is able to look a long way into the future, it seems. I should have a right to do what I liked with my money; and I think it would be very cruel to bring you here and accustom you to ease and comfort when I should soon have to thrust you back into poverty. When I promised to be a father and friend to you all, it was not for a few months or a year, but for our whole lives, if it please God to spare us to one another."

"So Aunt Ruth said. But, Uncle Robert — if it made you happier — when you are so good to us all —" and Kathie's voice quivered as she paused.

"Then you told Aunt Ruth?"

"After a while — yes. We were talking over our troubles one day, — she had felt afraid that she never should get well."

"It was rather critical at one time. And just then your burdens were made the heaviest, my poor child."

"But they all dropped off like Pilgrim's"; and Kathie smiled radiantly.

"Then Aunt Ruth's eyes were clearer?"

The child colored. "I'd like you to be very happy," she said, slowly.

"I shall depend upon you for a good deal of my happiness," he answered, glancing into the soft, sweet eyes. "Did you enlighten Ada afterward?"

"O no. Indeed, she said that she would not like *her* uncle to marry, so after having had the pain myself it would have been unkind to make her suffer."

"I am glad you thought so. We will keep our own counsel in this matter, as possibly nothing may come of it. But you did have some trials, Kathie, and severer ones than I should have supposed."

"They are all ended now, and I am home once more. It gives one such a glad, happy feeling,—does n't it? and when I am by you I seem to be safe and stronger. But, Uncle Robert, it was very pleasant, and I am not sorry that I went."

"I am thankful that you had the courage to stay. It has been quite a discipline, and may prove useful to you in the years to come. And I am more than

glad that you have not considered it necessary to copy Ada Meredith."

Kathie was silent some moments, then she said, in a rather perplexed tone, "Uncle Robert, is it insincere to like Ada some, and feel glad to be with her when she makes me happy, yet not love her in every respect?"

"My dear child, there are many really worthy people whom we cannot love in every respect. I think we find very few who suit us exactly, and then we may have some peculiarities that are annoying to others. So there must be a mutual patience to make the world go smoothly, you know"; and he gave her a sweet, cheery smile.

"Now I believe I have confessed most of the troubles"; and she smiled in turn. "I begin to feel quite like old times."

Uncle Robert pressed her to his heart, and then declared that they must visit the boys' department, or there would be a great outcry; so Kathie put on her cloak and hood, and to the barn they went. There were the ponies in their stalls, sleek and shining.

"O Hero, have you forgotten me?" and Kathie clasped her hands over the waving mane.

Hero pricked up his ears and surveyed Kathie out of his great black eyes.

"You dear old beauty!"

At this Hero gave a joyful whinny, and put his nose in Kathie's hand.

"Why, I do believe that he remembers!" she said, delightedly. "I am your own little mistress, Hero, and to-morrow we will take a nice canter together." Then she fed him some hay and talked to his companion, but Hero felt rather inclined to be jealous.

The guinea-pigs came next; and they looked more cunning than ever, bobbing about, their eyes wonderfully bright. The rabbits were quite a flourishing colony, but exceedingly shy at first.

"They are very fond of Freddy. The boys have had a good deal of enjoyment in the barn on rainy days."

"But the pound still flourishes?" said Kathie, with a smile in her eyes.

"Yes. Though somewhat on the decline, I still find it a useful institution. Freddy has grown much more careful."

"How good you are to take so much trouble with us all, Uncle Robert!" she said, gratefully.

“It is part of my duty, dear child.”

They must go to the Morrisons' cottage, for Hugh insisted upon that. There was grandmother in her snowy cap, but rather feeble with a March cold, “which had taken a powerful hold,” she said. Jamie was bright and full of smiles; but the baby had grown wonderfully, and could say ever so many words. Kathie played with it awhile, for she was very fond of children.

So by the time they arrived at home it was noon. Kathie found that her mother had been unpacking; and when she saw her dresses hanging up in the wardrobe, a great qualm of conscience came over her. “Mamma,” she said, regretfully, “it was very thoughtless in me to go off and leave all this work for you to do; why did n't you call me?”

“O, I thought you ought to have a little indulgence to-day, at least; but I have not taken care of all the articles. There are your books and various little keepsakes. Have you been enjoying your look about?”

“O, very much; and I have had a good talk with Uncle Robert. It seems so nice once in a while to confess all the things that have troubled you.”

Mrs. Alston glanced up suddenly ; but the bright face looked now as if it had never known an anxious thought.

Kathie busied herself restoring her room to its olden order, and put away the traces of her long absence.

"I feel now as if we had nothing to do but enjoy ourselves," she said to Aunt Ruth. "It seems to me that I shall be full of happiness. I have had all my wishes and am more than satisfied. Spring is coming, and we can make garden and take lovely long rambles. I never realized how splendid it would be to have you well."

"I give thanks for it every hour," was the low sweet reply.

The bell rang for lunch, and after that Kathie did a little practising until the boys came home, when Rob insisted upon her going to drive. Freddy thought it very hard. He had several Christmas games that he wanted her to play with him, and ever so many books, besides a village that was a great puzzle to build. And she had n't seen his playhouse at all !

"I 'll take a glimpse of that while the horses are getting harnessed," she said, cheerfully, and followed

Fred up stairs two steps at a time, a proceeding which he vainly tried to emulate.

"And to-morrow I will look at all the rest," she continued.

Rob felt quite proud of his sister, it must be confessed. He thought she had grown very pretty, and then she had a certain style that he liked. It was not affectation or "trying to shine" as the boys said, but the air and self-possession that one invariably gains in society. Kathie had been thrown so much upon her own judgment and resources that in some respects she was quite womanly. It was fortunate for her that vanity had so small a share in the qualities that went to make up her character.

Rob had become quite a fancy driver, and the ponies were in fine spirits. Kathie enjoyed it very much, and as they passed familiar faces she was greeted with nods and smiles.

"I've rechristened my pony," he announced to Kathie. "You know I named him Star first, on account of the white star in his breast, but he did not seem to take to that much, so I have called him Jasper."

"I like that better for a horse," replied Kathie.

"And Uncle Robert has been getting them in splendid trotting order. Just see how they go!"

They kept step as if all the feet belonged to one body, and never broke in the slightest movement.

"It 'll be royal this summer," Rob went on. "School closes about the middle of June, and there will be a long gay time to enjoy one's self. Uncle is going to get a boat, sure!"

"Have you grown any more interested in school?" asked Kathie, a little timidly.

"O, well—yes. I think I do like it better. There's one thing which exactly suits me, and that's chemistry. O, have n't we had some high experiments, though! I take to that, I tell you! And I get along pretty well with Latin, but it's awful tough work. I shall not be a bit sorry to have vacation come, for I think recreation rather agrees with my constitution."

Kathie laughed.

When they came home they found Miss Jessie there. Uncle Robert gave Kathie an odd little look, and squeezed her hand.

"I think it would be real nice," she whispered, "if you would only love us all the same, and I guess you would."

But the delightful freedom of Miss Jessie's manner was not love. She felt toward Uncle Robert as a dear friend, and she knew, moreover, that he must have mistrusted her secret, which was another link to draw them together. But Kathie kept hers with wise and graceful tact.

CHAPTER II.

A BIRD'S WISDOM AND A BOY'S WISDOM.

"WHAT do you suppose that I am going to do with myself, Uncle Robert?" Kathie asked after she had been home about a week. "I've visited all the girls, put my house in order, and since Aunt Ruth is so well there is very little for me to do. I used to wait upon her a great deal, but now she can walk about and help herself. And mamma's wonderful machine does all the sewing."

"Are you afraid of getting indolent?" he replied, with a mirthful smile. "That would be a sad state of affairs."

"Am I never going to school again?"

"It is hardly worth while now, as the summer will so soon be here. I have spoken to Mr. Lawrence about your music."

"Oh!" Kathie said, slowly.

"I fancy that you will find him very pleasant."

"But he has such stern-looking eyes, and they are always flashing about when you least expect it."

"Then the pupils will have to be attentive."

Mr. Lawrence was organist at one of the churches in Brookside, and was considered a very excellent teacher.

"You will soon get used to him, Kathie."

"But I should have liked Miss Jessie better. Everybody says that she plays beautifully."

"We could not take so much hard work from her as a favor, you know, and it would be rather awkward to offer to pay her."

Kathie understood the case at once.

"And then we will amuse ourselves by reading up in several branches. I might begin French with you. I used to be a very fair scholar. So I think you will find enough to do, with the duties of daughter and sister added."

"But they are very light," said Kathie, with a smile. "Freddy has improved wonderfully, and he is not half the trouble that he used to be. He doesn't always stop to ask you 'Why?' when you tell him to do anything."

"Mamma has had more time to devote to him this winter. Going to school alone, too, he has had to learn to be more responsible for his own actions

His bump of imitativeness is as large as a monkey's, and it is very difficult for him to understand that what might be proper in a large boy is not admissible in him."

"Children *are* a good deal of trouble, — are n't they, Uncle Robert?" Kathie said, thoughtfully.

"Yes, my darling, it takes a great amount of love and patience to get along and do what is best. We all make mistakes, I suppose."

"I wish I could do something to help you and mamma," was her slow, wistful answer.

"You do, my dear child. You have learned one of the most important lessons, — to think. So many of the faults of childhood arise from mere thoughtlessness. Of course we cannot expect perfection from an immature brain, but when one has mastered this, the rest comes much easier. But it takes a deal of persistent trying. I dare say that you had a hard time going up the Hill Difficulty."

"Yes, often. Aunt Ruth helped me a good deal, telling me about the giants."

"She turned fairy-stories to a wise account, it seems. And as you grow older you will find many duties, though I do not wish my little girl to start

with too heavy a burden. Your influence over Rob will be no small thing."

"But it does n't seem that I have any influence over Rob," Kathie said, in a rather discouraged tone.

"O yes, you have. Rob is one of the boys who hate to be managed or preached to, or have a hint of the curb. And yet he is noble in many things, and has the making of a fine, energetic man in him. I was glad that you went out to drive with him the first day that you were home. As he grows up you must try to make your society attractive to him. I wish he was fond of music."

"He does not dislike it."

"O no ; but he thinks it rather feminine."

"He never could endure anything girlish in a boy, though he likes Charlie Darrell now."

"Charlie Darrell is a notable exception to most boys. He is not weak or Miss-Nancyish, but a gentleman in the truest acceptation of the term. In another way Rob is capable of making as fine a man, only one has perfect faith that Charlie will never go astray, while Rob might make a headlong plunge before one was aware."

"I mean to try, Uncle Robert," Kathie said, ear-

nestly. "I will not let him think that he is a trouble or in the way.

"That is just it, Kathie. Growing boys are very sensitive on this point. And if we can manage to keep him straight for the next three years, I think we may safely trust him afterward."

Kathie was quite proud of being taken into confidence. She was really trying to be as useful as possible to those around her. Sometimes, it is true, she would rather have followed her own devices, but she did generally think in time.

"I wonder what is the matter with Gypsy?" Aunt Ruth exclaimed an hour or two later, as they were in her room. Kathie had been reading aloud from the "Queens of England," and now left the room to take a lesson from Hannah in making blanc-mange, for Mrs. Alston meant that she should become a thorough housekeeper.

Uncle Robert looked toward the cage. Gypsy was beating his breast against the bars, fluttering about, and uttering piteous cries.

"I suppose he wants to come out, though he does n't generally take that method of showing it. Gypsy!"

Gypsy paused a moment, but soon renewed his lamentations.

"I remarked it yesterday, and this morning he has had two such spells before. Poor fellow!"

Uncle Robert offered the captive his liberty. He accepted it with a bound, making a wild circuit of the room. Then he perched himself on the top of an oleander, but after a moment's swing began his sorrowful cry again, drooping his wings and seeming to put his whole body in a position of mourning.

"It certainly is very singular! Poor Gypsy, are you longing for your mates without?"

Gypsy gave an appealing look and essayed another sweeping flight.

"I always feel sorry to have a bird imprisoned," Aunt Ruth said, regretfully. "But Kathie loves him so dearly."

"I am not sure that liberty would be any boon to him. He has known no life beyond the cage, and has been cared for tenderly."

Gypsy settled himself and began a low, sad song, making long pauses in it, as if he might be waiting for some one to answer.

"He has been a very happy, contented bird all

winter," said Uncle Robert; "but perhaps the spring brings some troubled dream to him. If you could only tell me, Gypsy!"

Gypsy was doing his best. The wail was a pathetic story set to rare music, and it was not his fault if his listeners were slow to comprehend.

In despair at length he ceased his song and went back to his cage, curling himself on the perch.

"I'm afraid he is sick," Uncle Robert said, with much concern.

Kathie finished her lesson in the kitchen, and as Hannah was busy, offered to set the lunch-table. Afterward she ran up to Aunt Ruth's room.

"Gypsy," she called, in her cheery voice, as she opened the door.

Gypsy, who seemed an instant before in the soundest of naps, stirred, shook himself, and answered in a gay little carol.

Uncle Robert laughed. "Depend upon it that he was merely working upon our sympathies," he said.

"What did he do?" asked Kathie.

"Made us believe that he was in the last stages of grief. I expect he was crying after his mistress like a spoiled child.

Gypsy was bright enough now. He sang at a deafening rate, taking Kathie's shoulder for his perch, and turning his black eye at Uncle Robert in the most comical manner.

The bell rang for lunch. Kathie put him amongst the ivy branches and went towards the door, but Gypsy was there as soon.

"Why, I believe he did cry for Kathie," said Uncle Robert, "and this looks as if he meant to follow her. Come back, Kathie, and see what he will do."

Gypsy flew after his mistress with a most contented little chirrup.

"That is really it."

Sure enough. When she started he commenced a flight also. Through the hall, down the stairs, chirping in a most delighted fashion.

"O Uncle Robert, is n't it sweet? To have him follow me and love me so much! O you dear little precious!" and catching him she covered him with kisses.

"It is very peculiar."

"He really was crying for me then. Shall I take him back?" She had him cuddled in her hand, where he nestled in a most contented manner.

"We will indulge him this once," said her mamma.

"There, Kathie, you *have* charmed him!" exclaimed her uncle.

"I wanted him to love me a little bit better than any one else, because he is *my* bird. But how cunning it will be to have him follow me about! Did you ever know of a bird who did such a thing?"

"I have seen trained birds very obedient, and some of the men in Australia used to tame birds to a wonderful degree, but this is quite unexpected."

"When I was a little girl," said Mrs. Alston, "my grandfather had a tame robin that followed him, and I have heard that crows could be taught the same accomplishment."

"But a canary-bird is such a darling creature," said Kathie, fondly.

"And Gypsy has not been taught or trained. It must be a case of ardent love."

"I noticed yesterday that he acted strangely," said Aunt Ruth, "but that was the first."

"What did he do?" asked Kathie.

Uncle Robert told the story. Kathie was so much interested that she hardly knew whether she ate any lunch or not, and then she was quite afraid that Gypsy would forget his lesson before he could repeat it.

No fear of that, however. Gypsy was as ready to go up stairs as he had been to come down, and he hopped about on the flowers contentedly, chirruping now and then to Kathie, and rolling his bright eyes or winking very knowingly, as if he meant to imply that Kathie and he understood all about it, and it really was not worth while to tell any one else.

When the boys came home, Kathie had to make an exhibition of Gypsy. It was wonderful to Freddy. They went up to the top of the tower and down to the kitchen.

"Land alive!" exclaimed Hannah, "what are you making such a racket about?"

"Why it 's Gypsy, and he follows Kathie all over," announced Fred.

"O, the window is up, Miss Kathie, —"

Gypsy had espied it and perched himself on the sill. Hannah stood with uplifted hands and Kathie's heart beat rapidly with fear

"He will fly away," said Rob. "I'll go outside and startle him in."

Gypsy poured forth a melodious song. He appeared to be in the highest possible spirits.

"The dear creetur!" ejaculated Hannah. "He does n't really follow you, though?"

"Don't, Rob! let me try him first," for Rob had armed himself with Hannah's kitchen apron and was about to make a demonstration on a grand scale.

"Come, Gypsy," she said, in her soft voice, standing in the doorway.

But Gypsy had been experimented with considerably, and did not mean to be cheated. When the last vestige of Kathie's dress had disappeared Gypsy went skimming through the room and alighted on her shoulder, to be kissed rapturously.

"Well, I never saw the beat!" exclaimed Hannah. "And with the window open too, where he might ha' gone out just as well as not. Bring him back please, Miss Kathie. Such a little mite too, and he knowing so much!"

Rob entered the room and threw himself into a chair, looking very pale.

"Why, what's the matter with the boy?" said Hannah. "You ain't going to faint?"

"No," — rather roughly.

"But you look so — sick," Kathie rejoined in a tone of tender alarm.

"Only a little dizzy. I whisked around too suddenly out there."

Rob straightened himself up and took two or three steps, then made a rush for the sink-room, where there was always an abundance of empty pails and basins.

Sick enough surely. Hannah bustled about and gave him a little dissolved soda to drink. He sat down pale as a ghost, great drops of perspiration standing out on his forehead.

"O Rob dear, can't I do something for you?" said Kathie, with fondest solicitude.

"No. You and Freddy go up stairs. I've been running around too much, so I'll lie down here a moment on Hannah's lounge."

A queer excuse for Rob to make, — Rob who could tramp from morning till night. The children obeyed however, and took the news immediately to mamma, who was filled with concern.

Freddy went back to the entertaining Gypsy.

"He's almost as nice as my parrot. Polly can't fly like that, but then she can climb, and Gypsy can't talk."

The parrot was not a universal favorite, and was seldom invited to Aunt Ruth's room. It screeched terribly, and had a bad temper, besides being mis-

chievous ; therefore it was generally kept in Fred's play-room except on Saturday, when he was home from school, when the two were allowed some extra indulgence. Now he was permitted to bring it down, and they had a good deal of fun.

Mrs. Alston in the mean while had gone to the kitchen. Rob was rather vexed at all this attention ; but he could not very well be cross with his mother.

"Had you been eating anything ?" she asked.

"No," was the brief answer.

"Or over-exerting ? I think sometimes that you take the gymnasium too hard."

"I have n't been in the gymnasium to-day."

"I really hope that you are not going to be ill."

Rob wished that he had let her think it was the turn-pole, or anything, so that she did not question him too closely.

"Does your head ache ?"

"Yes."

It really seemed splitting to Rob just then, — as if a sledge-hammer was beating upon his temples.

"So sudden, too ; did you feel it when you came home ?"

"A little ; then I ran round with Kathie and the

bird, you know." Rob felt that was an evasion, and he colored. His mother noticed it.

"It is warm here, and I think you had better go up stairs, where it is cool and quiet. You may get over it without any further trouble."

Rob thought the advice very good. He made a great effort, but his head was weak and dizzy.

"Do you feel strong enough?"

"I guess so."

His mother arranged him nicely on the lounge in her room and bathed his face with cologne. She fancied that she detected a peculiar smell about his clothing. "I'll send the parrot out to the barn," she said, as he winced at one of its screeches; and then she left him alone, for which he was very thankful.

Freddy felt very badly at having his fun interrupted; but Kathie offered to go out to the barn with him and give him a good swing.

"And we'll feed the rabbits and guinea-pigs! We'll have a jolly time, after all."

Kathie shut Gypsy in his cage, and told him to be a good little bird and not fret after her. He appeared to understand, or else he was hungry, for after two or three brief laments he went to cracking seed.

Polly always enjoyed excursions to the barn, for here she was allowed her liberty. She scrambled up and down, called to Hero and Jasper, told them to "g'-lang," "hud-ap," and made a peculiar clicking sound with her bill like the fastest whip on the road ; then she whistled and called Rover, who came tumbling headlong and looked all round for Rob.

"Now you 're fooled !" shouted Polly, at which Rover slunk away terribly crestfallen.

The children played until dusk, and Freddy declared that it had been splendid. He would n't mind if Rob's head ached every day.

"O," said Kathie, "that would be too bad for poor Rob."

"Well, if it could ache without hurting him any."

"But it could not; and it is n't pleasant to be sick."

Mrs. Alston had taken her seat and sewing very quietly after Polly and the younger ones had gone. She looked so exceedingly serious that presently her brother said, "You are not alarmed about Rob, I hope?"

"Physically it is nothing worse than a severe headache and nausea," she replied.

"Mentally and morally then?"

"I am afraid he has been smoking. I am quite sure that the scent of cigars was in his clothes."

Uncle Robert laughed.

"I am sure you do not approve of boys' smoking," she said, almost reproachfully.

"The headache, I fancy, will be a better ally than our disapproval."

"But boys are very persistent. They will suffer a good deal for the sake of a little gratification."

"We will try to prevent it from becoming a confirmed habit. I think this will last him a week, at least. I wonder that he has not tried it before."

"You treat it very lightly," she said.

"But you may rest assured, Dora, that I do not approve of the practice in so young a boy, and will do my best to eradicate it. Do not feel distressed."

"Will you speak to him about it?"

"Yes."

The children came in and made themselves ready for dinner. Mrs. Alston stole in to see Rob a moment, and found him easier, but very sleepy.

"A nap will set me up right again," he said, hopefully.

They all missed him, and Kathie hoped fervently that he was not going to be sick. "We had such a time with him a year ago,—did n't we, mamma?" she said. "But I think he was real sweet afterward."

"Sickness does improve people sometimes," Uncle Robert remarked, with a half-smile. "However, Rob will be well by morning."

"How can you tell?" she asked.

"O, I have a famous faculty of guessing."

Rob was much better at bedtime, and accepted his uncle's arm up stairs because he could not very well refuse. He was not sermonized, nor even suspected, he thought.

He had made one essay before during Uncle Robert's absence, and felt just badly enough to be very cross. This time he had gone farther, though if he had been honest he would have confessed that the pleasure did not pay for the pain.

"But then all men *do* smoke," he said, consolingly, to himself, as he fell asleep.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE RIGHT SIDE.

ROB was bright and clear-headed the next morning, with a ravenous appetite for his breakfast. His mother asked no questions, but Kathie kept wondering from the depths of her tender heart if it really had been the running round after the bird. Rob colored and felt guilty, but tried to pass it over in an indifferent manner.

"But it is wonderful about Gypsy, — is n't it?" he said. "Why, he might have flown away very easily."

"I don't believe he would," was Kathie's triumphant rejoinder.

"I think I would be a little careful," Uncle Robert said. "His sudden freak is something very unusual, but it is best not to place entire confidence in it too soon."

When the boys at school compared notes, for about half a dozen were learning to smoke, Rob preserved a

discreet silence. He was rather graver than usual, and studied perseveringly, and as a natural consequence had perfect recitations.

When he came home the horses were up to the light wagon, and Uncle Robert stood talking to Mr. Morrison.

"O, where are you going?" was his eager question.

"Over to Kennett's Station to the nursery. We want some more trees, I find. Would you like to keep me company?"

"O yes, indeed. I'll just run in with my books."

Little did Rob suppose that this was a cunningly devised trap, but his uncle understood boys pretty well.

Rob was in capital spirits. Everything had gone just right with him all day. Unknowingly, Rob was cultivating conscience quite rapidly. When he did anything that he felt was really wrong he tried to make amends for it by extra goodness and attention, unless an obstinate fit overtook him, and these happened less frequently than in past days.

The afternoon was quite mild. The ice had broken up in Guilford River, but the edge of Silver Lake

was still enchained by the remnant of the once solid mass whereon the boys had enjoyed much fun. The cedars looked bluer than ever, and the pines were casting off their yellow needles.

"We can soon go to the woods for wild-flowers," said Rob. "That 's Kathie's great delight."

"And the woods will not be very far."

"Uncle Robert, we have begun geology. It interests me very much. When the frost gets out of the ground, Mr. Deane is going to take the class out some Saturday."

"And very entertaining you will find it. I am glad to have you look into nature a little. There is many a profound idea hidden under her brown crust, and it seems to me that the nearer a man gets to her and to God, the better he is."

"But, Uncle Robert, some people think the Bible and geology cannot agree."

"I believe you will find, my dear boy, that there is nothing positively antagonistic. You know there was a time when the revolutions of the earth were considered the wildest falsity, and condemned as rank heresy. We often judge too soon. And above all things I hope you will not get into the flippant and

irreverent manner of criticising the Bible that some boys take for a sign of manliness, as they do swearing."

"I hate swearing!" said Rob, with energy.

"I hope you will never fall into the habit. There always seems something coarse and brutal about it to me. I am thankful that it never was one of my faults."

"But, uncle," said Rob, returning to the first subject, "does n't it seem singular that Joshua should have commanded the sun and moon to stand still. That is just what the Bible says."

"I feel like answering as the colored minister did: 'My bredderen, where do you read dat He set 'em a goin' again?'"

Rob laughed at this.

"We always say at the present day that the sun rises and sets. It might have been a common mode of speech in those times. I think there is enough that we can understand without plunging into those abstruse mysteries. It requires a great deal of judgment and wisdom to discuss them, and this is why I object to boys taking up such subjects. They are apt to fall into an irreverent state very painful to older

persons. One can never be too thorough a gentleman."

Rob's eye had fallen upon Jasper, who seemed very mettlesome, and forgetting all about the tertiary and secondary period, he exclaimed, eagerly, "O Uncle Robert, let's have a race!"

He placed the reins in the boys' hands, and at a word the ponies started off. The most comical event was an old gray horse in the distance, whose ambitious blood was fired by the ring of the swift hoofs, and who went through with some astonishing evolutions; but Jasper and Hero soon left him behind in a cloud of dust.

"Uncle Robert, do you think racing wrong?" he asked, presently, as the horses slackened their pace a trifle.

"It depends a good deal upon the occasion and the quality of it."

"I don't mean betting and all that."

"I think trotting and trials of speed extremely interesting and fascinating, and keeping a fast horse is a source of unfailing amusement to a person fond of driving; yet it does sometimes lead to an immense deal of harm."

"But, Uncle Robert, I should n't think real good, strong-minded men would be afraid."

"They are not the kind generally led into mischief. It is the boys and men who are *not* strong-minded, but believe they are. When one is all excitement and interest it is a very easy thing to bet, and drinks all round seem the mildest form. It has been proven time and again that a race-course cannot be kept clear of liquor, betting, gambling, and evil associates. A person slips into them imperceptibly."

"But if one realizes that they would surely harm him?"

"Very few are willing to admit that they *can* be harmed or tempted; and sometimes a person does a thing that is absolutely disagreeable, and goes against all his finer tastes and feelings, simply to be like the company he is in."

"But that is very foolish."

"You think such a temptation would not ensnare you?" and there was a quizzical smile in Uncle Robert's eye.

"No," answered Rob, with much decision.

"If a perfectly useless habit should be very distasteful to you in the beginning you would not

persevere, then, for the sake of imitating some friend or companion ?”

“Why, I should be an idiot!” was the energetic reply.

“Then I suppose your yesterday’s experience will cure you of trying to smoke,” was the grave rejoinder.

“Uncle Robert,” and the boy’s face was scarlet, “how *can* you find out everything ?”

He was too much surprised to be vexed, and so remained perfectly good-natured. Uncle Robert had taken him at just the right moment. “I’ve been there myself,” was the reply, with a droll smile.

“Did it make you sick ?”

“Yes.”

“And what did you do ?”

“Went on like the idiot you characterized a moment ago. If I had suffered as much for a month with a fever I should have considered myself quite ill.”

“But why *did* you persevere ?”

“Rob, will you tell me honestly whether you resolved to give it up last night ?”

“No, I did n’t,” he answered, slowly, while a flush mounted to his brow.

"Well, why did n't you?"

"Uncle Robert, almost everybody smokes or chews. And what great harm does it do?"

"Of what real service is it?"

"Why, men take it as a sort of rest, do they not? I thought it looked very comfortable to see Mr. Meredith smoke. And Tom Allen at school said it was recommended for asthma, or some kind of trouble in his throat."

"But that can't be your excuse, neither are you so overburdened with care that it is necessary to drown it in clouds of smoke."

Rob was silent a moment. "But it is n't a bad habit like drinking, and it would never lead a person into much temptation," he said.

"All habits are of relative importance either for good or evil. They form a well-balanced, symmetrical character, or tend to weaken aught that might become so. Now give me your reasons for learning to smoke."

"I think it must be a real enjoyment, and — a good many of the boys smoke."

Rob's tone was rather slow, as if he felt his cause was a little lame.

"Is that the best you can say for it?"

"Well," was the rather impatient rejoinder, "I suppose 'most every person has some indulgence."

Rob's face flushed and his temper was getting hot. "Why did *you* do it?" he asked.

"Because I was foolish, as I told you in the beginning. I had no mother and was sent to boarding-school, and at home my father had a smoking-room, where he used to sit with his friends. He thought as much of having a cigar-holder on the table as Kathie does of a bouquet. No one ever said anything against it, and I thought it a great triumph to persevere. At twenty I was an inveterate smoker."

"Did n't you enjoy it?"

"I suppose I must have. A luxury that costs one, two, or three hundred dollars a year, ought to pay in some kind. But when I began my new life I gave it up, and it was a hard trial. I thought then how foolish I had been to suffer so much in learning and unlearning a bad habit."

"Did n't you think it right?" Rob's voice was low and serious.

"No, my boy, that was just it. I said to myself, 'Here is an indulgence that does me no good, and

sometimes harm. It often gives me a dull, stupid feeling, it scents my clothes and my breath, and if I were going into ladies' society I should use some perfume to disguise it, — for although many women politely refrain from objecting, very few really like it. I might do much good with the money that it costs, so I will just stop,' — and I did. I enter upon no general crusade against smoking, but I do strongly and earnestly advise all boys *not* to make the attempt."

Rob did not look as if he was altogether convinced. "It cannot harm any one very much," he said, slowly. "There are a good many healthy old men who are always smoking."

"Neither can it be any great advantage to have your brain and nerves and eyes forever steeped in a cloud of smoke. I believe it does *injure* many a person. And now I am going to make you an offer."

Rob glanced up in expectation.

"If you will not learn to smoke until you are twenty I will give you a handsome gun this summer, and convince your mother that you can use it without making yourself food for powder."

"O Uncle Robert! That will be splendid! Yes,

I'll do it"; and the boy's face was most bright and eager.

"Remember what you are promising. You must withstand all temptations, for I expect you to keep your word sacredly."

"Of course I shall," declared Rob, energetically. "And, to tell the truth, it made me awfully sick. I don't believe it is very good for any one."

"Not when it goes so against nature"; and Uncle Robert smiled. "Here we are at the station."

They went in to see Mr. Whitneath, and selected the trees. Then they took a walk through the green-houses. Three long rows, filled with flowers to the roof, many of them blossoming profusely, and so fragrant that the air was almost stifling.

"How Kathie would enjoy it!" Rob exclaimed.

"I mean to bring her over some day. She is counting a great deal on extensive garden operations this summer."

"I believe I'll try my hand at it too," said Rob, won into enthusiasm.

They had a pleasant drive home, and were most excellent friends. Rob was much elated at the idea of having a gun of his own.

"And so another temptation has been tided over," Uncle Robert thought, as he watched his nephew's frank, manly face that evening. Four or five dangerous years yet to come. Would he always be able to guide the boy through the many swift currents that were in waiting to drive him to the broad ocean of destruction? O boys! do you ever realize how many anxious hours you cost, and that what seems so slight a matter that you can see no harm in it is often a beguiling siren to lure one into wrong?

Uncle Robert had not spoken too soon. Rob had unconsciously fallen into the forbidden practice of treating. Twice he had allowed himself to accept of a cigar; and a day or two after this conversation one of the boys hinted that it was his turn to "shell out the tin," as he elegantly expressed it.

"Well," he said, "come on down the street."

Four boys followed. At the cigar-store they met Lu Simonds. "Well, fellows!" a little surprised at seeing Rob.

Robert Alston walked up to the counter and bought five cigars of the tobacconist's attractive daughter. They cost twenty-five cents, all the money he had; not very expensive, to be sure,

but the kind the boys were used to buying. He dealt them round.

"Where 's yours?" asked Lu, with a spasm of delicacy.

"I 've given out on the subject. It made me sick as a dog yesterday, and I have no desire to try it over again"; and somehow Rob felt braver and more manly when he had uttered this.

"After all, it does cost a good deal," he thought, as he parted with the boys. "There 's treating in this like all other things, and men pay from ten to twenty cents for cigars. Yes, Uncle Robert is right; it 's a foolish habit."

Gypsy in the mean while was the centre of an admiring throng. Miss Jessie was much astonished, and declared that Kathie must have some secret power of charming. The most wonderful part seemed to be that Gypsy could go out of doors, and hop around, or fly from shrub to shrub, and Kathie had only to say, "Come, Gypsy, I 'm going in," when he would follow most obediently. Every day he grew more extravagantly fond of the child. He would nestle down on her shoulder and go to sleep among her soft curls, sing at her bidding, and

perform various little tricks ; but though he was tame and cunning to the others, he evinced no such peculiar love. She sent Mr. Meredith a glowing account of her achievements, and he declared that he must come immediately and see for himself, as he was afraid her partiality had led her to exaggerate.

They were not at all surprised to see him a week or so later. Kathie felt strangely timid at first, remembering the unfortunate incident in which she had unwittingly been so conspicuous. But he had evidently forgotten all about it, and was his olden gay self, very glad to see Kathie and the boys.

"And it is a treat to behold Miss Conover going around in such an independent fashion," he said. "Why, you are actually getting roses here in April, which is no more like spring than midwinter."

"O yes," exclaimed Kathie, "the grass begins to have a green tint, and we are going to the woods to look for wild-flowers."

"You must certainly wear green spectacles."

"No, I do not"; and Kathie laughed with the brightest eyes that Mr. Meredith had seen for a long while.

"Then you see with the eye of faith the things for which you hope."

It seemed to Kathie that she had obtained many such glimpses, but she had never thought of it in that light before.

"But the flowers are real," she said, after a pause.

"I beg to be included in your ramble. When will it be?" Mr. Meredith asked.

"O, let us go this afternoon, Uncle Robert."

"Very well."

"I wish you would wait till I come home," said Rob, eagerly. "I have a taste for the beautiful also."

"It is n't as good as birch or sassafras," said Fred, slowly, swallowing his last mouthful of toast.

Rob laughed. "You gave a brilliant sign of life there, Freddy. I thought I should have to fish you out of your mug of milk."

That started him on another tack. "Why can't we go fishing?" he said. "It's nicer than the woods anyhow!"

"Fred is the oddest chap I ever saw," exclaimed Rob. "If you talked of planting a balloon vine he would engage passage in the balloon."

They all laughed, and Freddy looked puzzled, as if he could not quite understand where the fun came in.

"Then the walk to the woods will be for this afternoon," said Mr. Meredith. "Can you indulge in such tramps, Miss Conover?"

"I think I will, as the day is fine," Aunt Ruth answered, with a pleasant smile.

"So we shall have quite a party. I dare say Kathie will think of half a dozen others that she would like to ask," Mr. Meredith returned.

"O, if it is to be a party I can very easily find ever so many. Miss Jessie said that she had not been to the woods yet this spring." And then Kathie felt a sudden heat in her face and turned it away.

"Well, we might drive over this morning and ask her," returned Mr. Meredith, gravely.

"And if there would n't be too many —"

"O, the inevitable Lucy and Annie Gardiner," laughed Rob, as he strapped his books together.

"Well?" questioned Kathie.

"O, it's all right. And I'll bring Charlie along."

Before they set out for the drive Gypsy and the piano claimed some attention. And then Miss Jessie was very glad to see them, and kept them to lunch by promising to return with them.

"I hear that your little bird follows you everywhere," said Grandmother Darrell to Kathie.

"Yes, he does ; and he is very sweet and cunning."

"But how did you get him to do it at first ?"

"It was just a fancy that he took. I was afraid that he would forget all about me while I was away."

"I don't believe any one could ever forget you, child ; and you are so loving yourself that you win all others. It's like the old fairy-story of the diamonds and pearls that the little girl dropped. I dare say that you have read it."

"O yes, it is in my book that came a year ago Christmas. I thought, when I first had it, that I was just as happy as I could be."

"But you grow happier ?"

Kathie gave a bright, sweet smile.

"As children always should, and then they are as great pleasure to all around as to themselves."

It was very nice to be a pleasure to everybody, Kathie thought ; but instead of being elated by grandma's commendation, she paused to wonder if she was not sometimes a trouble as well.

By and by they went home, though Kathie was

left at Mrs. Gardiner's, according to request. Annie was home sick with a cold, but Lucy was very glad to take a nice ramble in such pleasant company.

Back of Silver Lake there was a ridge of woody hills ; indeed, a mile or so below they were called "the mountains." Uncle Robert ordered the large carriage and stowed them in. Kathie came down with a pretty white Snug Harbor basket, that had been given to her the summer before.

"I don't know but I ought to borrow a market basket," Mr. Meredith said, gravely, glancing at Mrs. Alston. "I might find some blackberries or peaches."

"Who ever heard of peaches growing in a wood?" and Kathie gave a ringing laugh.

Mr. Meredith ran his fingers through his hair as if in great perplexity.

"But if you are so determined to have mid-summer at once, we may as well begin to think of peaches."

"We will have spring first," she said as they drove off, "for Uncle Robert fancied that the walk there would make the ramble altogether too long for Aunt Ruth."

It was a very pleasant day with a balmy air, and as it had not rained recently the woods were in a good condition, the soft paths of fallen leaves quite dry.

“Hark!” exclaimed Mr. Meredith, “there is a wood-robin.”

They listened to the peculiar song, ending with a low, sad call, and the echo of the warble grew fainter and fainter.

“How I should like to know all the birds!” said Kathie. “I am afraid of getting names misplaced.”

“And I’d like to have a gun,” declared Rob.

“O, it is wicked to shoot the darling little things.”

“No, it is n’t, — is it, Mr. Meredith?”

“An open question, Rob. I like genuine hunting, but to kill these poor little birds that at the best are only a bunch of bright feathers does n’t seem very manly sport.”

“O, what quantities of pine cones!” said Lucy. “I mean to take some home.”

“I too,” announced Rob. “I want to make some rustic baskets and stands.”

“Here is a flower”; and Kathie held up a pale pink arbutus.

"And here is another!" Aunt Ruth displayed a tiny bell-shaped blossom with two pale green leaves.

"I shall have to confess to the midsummer," said Mr. Meredith, laughingly.

They all set to work in earnest. Kathie found some beautiful mosses and lichens, and for all Mr. Meredith's pretended ignorance, his eyes seemed to be quite sharp. Now and then he increased Kathie's store by some rare and beautiful addition.

Presently they were startled by a wild scream from Lucy, who was as white as a ghost, and, in starting to run, tripped and came down on her nose.

"A snake! a snake!" she cried, in terror.

Kathie caught sight of the great brown reptile winding his way down the hillside towards them.

"O, there he is!"

Mr. Meredith caught Aunt Ruth in his arms, and lifted her aside. Valiant Rob seized a cudgel and dealt the monster a blow. His tail seemed to fly up in the air, and then all was still.

"He's finished!"

Uncle Robert stepped cautiously forward and looked. Rob took a hasty stride, and then both laughed.

“Hurrah ! Here ’s his snakeship” ; and Rob held up a partially decayed brown sapling, bent almost like a bow, and with a great knob on the root end that might easily be distorted into a head.

Lucy was still pale and shivering, and Kathie looked frightened.

“Equal to some of the ghosts,” said Mr. Meredith ; “but it might easily alarm any one as it came gliding down hill.”

They had a little fun over it, and then returned home with an abundance of trophies.

CHAPTER IV.

ROB'S ESSAY AS A SAILOR.

KATHIE made quite a display with her flowers. She filled a vase and a pretty glass saucer, and insisted that the library was very fragrant from the delicate perfume of the arbutus. Rob told the snake story in so tragic a style that Freddy was a good deal disappointed "because it was n't a real snake, after all." Mr. Meredith had to take Miss Jessie home, as Charlie could not join the party, though I am afraid he would have considered his escort necessary all the same. So the rest gathered in Aunt Ruth's room when the lamps were lighted.

"I 'm so glad summer is coming!" exclaimed Rob. "Vacation begins on the twenty-second day of June, — ten weeks yet; but the time *will* pass, and there will be a good deal of fun in the excitement about examination. Some of the fellows are pegging away sharp, I tell you!"

"And what are you doing?"

"O, it is n't my second year, and I can't come in for a prize. I may possibly be distinguished. Uncle Robert, will I go there next year, think?"

"I have n't decided yet," was the rather grave reply.

"I believe I 'd like to go to a regular boarding-school."

"Why?"

Rob's first impulse was to say, "Because they have such lots of fun," but he thought it better to keep this fact in the background. "I 'd like a change," he answered, quite soberly.

"I hope I shall never have to go," was Kathie's grave comment; "there's no place in the world as lovely as Cedarwood."

"O, you're a girl!" was Rob's rather disdainful rejoinder.

"But would n't you get homesick?"

"Homesick! no, not I; did you while you were in New York?"

Kathie gave a faint smile and said, "That was not quite like going to school."

"I'm not afraid. Uncle Robert, are we to have a boat pretty soon?"

"I have been thinking of it."

"Will it be a sail-boat?"

Mrs. Alston looked up also for the reply.

"It is best to try rowing first, I fancy."

"Well, I want a real slim little beauty that will cut the water like a knife. Won't it be gay! But I think a sail-boat the nicest."

"Why?"

"Because," and Rob looked a trifle perplexed, not having any very clear idea on the subject, "it is not such hard work, and requires more brain to manage it."

"And a flaw of wind may upset your management and your boat."

"But I'd learn all about it."

"That takes time. Rowing is a very healthy exercise, and quite an accomplishment in my estimation."

"Girls sometimes row," said Kathie.

"O yes, often; I should like you to learn."

"I wonder if I could," was her doubtful rejoinder.

"Why, of course," Rob replied.

"It will be delightful to have a boat!" she said.
"Think of floating around the cool shores of Silver Lake; and then, Uncle Robert, we can gather the

lilies that seemed to mock us last summer in their security."

They had spent all one afternoon endeavoring to get them, and Uncle Robert had tried numerous inventions, but not a single lily did they capture.

"Rob," said his uncle, after a little pause, "we will go down to Connor's Point some day and see what they have. If nothing suits us, we can order one built."

"That would be the best, for then we can have it just as we like."

"But we may have to wait some time."

"I wish I could see them build it."

"It would not be very entertaining, I fancy. It always seems to the one looking on that men work very slowly."

"How long would it take?"

"O, two or three weeks for it to dry properly, be painted, and dry again."

Rob gave a long whistle. "Anyhow there's one thing for summer; and fishing and riding and —" hunting, he wanted to say very much, but restrained himself.

"You'll never enjoy a vacation of play so much again, Rob," said his uncle, with a quaint smile.

"Why?"

"Because you grow older every year, and after this your desires and tastes will change rapidly."

"I believe I shall be almost sorry"; and Rob sighed.

The little bronze clock struck nine, the children's usual bedtime. Kathie had a last word and a caress all round, and was hardly through by the time Rob had tumbled into bed.

"Brother," said Mrs. Alston when they were alone, "do you think it best for Rob to go away to school another year?"

"I believe I do," he answered with a soft, grave inflection.

"But why?" and her yearning mother's heart trembled at the prospect.

"Well, partly to try an experiment. A boy could be fitted for college at the academy, and Mr. Darrell proposes to make no change with Charlie, but Rob needs a sort of self-dependence that he will never acquire there."

"I think he has too much already."

"But not of the right kind. I believe with you that I would rather keep him here and watch the

daily unfolding of his character, but I am almost certain that it would not be so well for him. He will have to learn many things by experience, and he will have less temptation at a boarding-school than at college. I want to feel comparatively certain of him before he goes very far into the world."

"But it seems to me that boys can be strengthened more by a wise and tender home influence."

"Some boys, — Charlie Darrell, for instance, or perhaps Dick Grayson. But Rob seldom believes a thing thoroughly until he has tried it. After he has been worsted in two or three battles he may be more tractable. My dear Dora, do not conjure up terrible phantoms. I have no doubt but that Rob's school life will be a success, and it may serve to endear his home to him."

Mrs. Alston said no more. It did not seem right to gainsay her brother when he was so kind and considerate in every respect.

"Will this render you unhappy?" he asked in a low tone.

"I shall not allow it to have that effect"; and she smiled rather sadly.

"If I did not think that there was a great deal at

stake, I would not be so anxious to try the experiment, and you must be content in having one lovely child who will cause you no uneasiness. I think, too, that Freddy will mature into a docile, affectionate boy."

"Kathie is a comfort," her mother said, tenderly; "yet at one time she seemed very heedless."

"But she has learned the grand art of trying, and now you must have faith for the others."

Mrs. Alston breathed a brief prayer that she might be able to trust the future for them without any misgiving.

The boat project was discussed before Mr. Meredith, and he proposed accompanying them; so, a day or two after, Rob rushed home from school in great earnest, to be in time for the train. He ate a mouthful of lunch and gave his hair a hasty brush, then started off in high glee.

Silver River or The Creek, as the old-fashioned people called it, was a small winding stream at the southern end of the village. About four miles below, at Rushville, it emptied into Guilford River. This being much larger and navigable, there was a good deal of business done along its banks. At Rushville there

were two large iron-founderies, a woollen-mill, and several smaller factories. The next place of any note was Connor's Point, another thriving little village, and here the river made a very decided curve, the point of land jutting out, forming a small cove. Here a Mr. Braddon kept quite a ship-yard, built schooners, yachts, sail-boats, and all that kind of craft. Boats were let as well as sold ; indeed, boating was quite a business at the Point. A branch road stopped at these places, though it was quite a walk to Mr. Braddon's, who, after the fashion of the Hollanders, lived as far out in the water as he could get to have any ground at all.

Rob was in his element. Indeed, he had talked pretty largely at school about his boat, exciting a great interest among the boys. And now that he was actually here, and on the eve of bargain-making, he felt like throwing up his cap and hurrahing to the extent of his lungs. Or he might have stood on his head, his enthusiasm reached such a pitch.

Mr. Braddon took them out on the dock. Two or three trim, jaunty-looking yachts lay rocking in the current that flowed quite swiftly round the point.

“O,” exclaimed Rob, “are n’t they beauties! Now that’s what I’d like!”

“But you would want a larger place than Silver Lake, or you would be apt to have the sensation of going a fishing in a wash-tub,” said Mr. Meredith.

“With a bent pin!” and Rob laughed.

“I suppose a row-boat will look rather small to your rapidly enlarging vision,” his uncle rejoined.

“But it will appear larger on the lake.”

“And if you can manage it yourself it will be much more pleasure than always to wait until another person is at liberty.”

Rob had not thought of that before. His fancy veered round like a sail in a flaw of wind.

“After I learn to row, I can go out any time?” he said, with an eager glance.

“I mean that you shall understand it thoroughly, and the boat is to be your own.”

“No partnership affair about that!” was the triumphant rejoinder.

“We are in search of a fine row-boat,” explained Mr. Conover, walking out to gain a view of the smaller craft.

“There’s two that are just about right,—the

Jessie and the Pride of Gordon. That I built for a young man last summer, but he only kept it a month, as he went into the navy."

"How odd that this one should be named Jessie! Why, it's almost in honor of Miss Jessie at home!" said Rob.

"Is that your sweetheart, young man?" asked Mr. Braddon, with a shrewd wink.

Rob colored to the roots of his hair in such a violent fashion that Mr. Meredith could not forbear smiling.

"No, indeed!" he disclaimed, with great haste and energy.

"Well, here's the Vixen, though I can't say that her temper is especially bad; and the Sylph, a little beauty. Would you like to try any of them?" — to the gentlemen.

"Which one takes your fancy most, Rob?" asked his uncle.

There were half a dozen more with various cognomens. Rob eyed them all critically.

"The Vixen looks as if she might be a swifter. She's slim, and I like the way she sits up out of the water."

"But she's small, Rob. You could n't take out much of a party in her."

"The Pride of Gordon is the best thing here in the shape of a row-boat," said Mr. Braddon. "Next to her I'd take the Jessie, — that is, if you want it for parties. You can have the name changed, you know."

"I believe we do not care about one quite as large as the Pride of Gordon. We'll try the Jessie first, and then the Vixen."

Mr. Braddon unlocked the chain, and hunted up the oars. They looked almost like feathers, and had the name painted in a curious bronze-color that turned golden as soon as it was wet. Her water-line was a fine stripe of green and gold, and above a band of carmine. A slender, gracefully pointed bow, and a tiny mast for a streamer, gave her a jaunty look.

Mr. Meredith took his seat in the stern, and Mr. Conover grasped the oars.

"You can judge her best by standing on the pier, young man," said Mr. Braddon, but Rob could not forego the pleasure of making one of the ship's company. He fairly envied his uncle the ease and dexterity with which he managed the oars, and his

fingers almost ached to get hold of them. If he only knew how to row!

They went along beautifully, skimming the water like a bird. Rob was quivering with delight.

"Well?" his uncle exclaimed at length.

"O, she's splendid! As good as any of the others; don't you think so?"

"I like her very much," said Mr. Meredith. "She's well balanced and a good sailer. How about the rowing, Conover?"

Uncle Robert laughed, and sent the boat ahead with a quick stroke of the oars. It seemed like child's play, and Rob was quite sure that he could row.

They turned about presently and went back to the pier. Mr. Braddon had the Vixen ready for them.

Rob concluded that it was rather small for a party, and he meant to have such fun taking out the boys.

"I guess I like the Jessie best," he said, presently.

"I think I do also. It would be easier for you to manage this, but you'll soon get into it."

"I'd like to try," the boy returned, wistfully.

"I propose to return home by water, so you may have an opportunity," his uncle said. "But what about the name? though I suppose we could have that altered at home."

"O, I like it, and Kathie will be delighted. But won't it surprise Miss Jessie?"

Mr. Meredith fancied that it would.

Mr. Braddon was quite anxious they should try some of the others, but Uncle Robert was satisfied. The price seemed to be a fair one, and the business arrangements were soon concluded.

The tide was coming in, though thus far up the river it was not very powerful, but the wind also was in their favor. Mr. Braddon offered to send the boat up the next day, but Rob was wild to go home in it, and Mr. Meredith proposed to take a turn. It would not be very hard work.

"I've done a great deal of this business in my day," said Uncle Robert. "One gets used to it on the other continent, especially in a region of islands."

"I used to be considered a crack oarsman at Yale, but since I've grown so lazy the work has been rather hard. Rob, do you know anything about steering?"

Now Rob's knowledge of a sailor's life had been gathered from stories where a long, low, rakish-looking craft distanced her pursuers, and his practical ability had been exercised upon a mud-scow, propelled by a pole, but it looked so very simple that he felt quite confident.

"I have never steered, but I think I could. You just pull the end of the rope a little one side or the other, as you want her to go."

"You may take a seat here in the stern with me."

"Not just yet, Meredith. Wait until we are round the point."

Presently Rob was inducted into the mysteries of the tiller, and took his seat with great importance.

"We are in the channel, and you need scarcely stir it until we come to a curve. Just tight, — so."

Rob was sure that he did it exactly right, and was feeling secretly elated when the boat appeared to lean a trifle to the left, and he thought he would right her up, but she went farther and farther.

"To the right, Rob," said Mr. Meredith, in a low tone.

Rob gave a positive jerk.

"Take care," said his uncle; "the bank is shallow and you will run us aground."

Mr. Meredith gave the rope a pull.

"O," exclaimed Rob, with a scarlet face, "I had hold of the wrong end."

"Just steady."

Then the Jessie took a very decided tack to the left, and Uncle Robert tried to steer with the oar. Rob began to think it was not so easy, after all.

"At this rate you will double our journey," said his uncle, good-naturedly.

Rob was getting confused with his many efforts.

"You steer *too* much," Mr. Meredith began, with a smile. "The tiller does n't want to be stirred."

"But when we get crooked I must go straight again," Rob said, rather impatiently.

Mr. Meredith "straightened" for a few seconds, and all went right.

"Now hold it just so."

Rob sat as if he were in a vise, and looked straight ahead. On they went as if following a line.

"That's it. It is not much, you see, when you know how."

And then Uncle Robert made the boat glide along

as if she were on ice. The smooth, regular strokes were like music with their splash. The boy watched with a longing eye, and fancied himself there in the rower's place, keeping time like a soldier's step.

"O Rob, the shore!" exclaimed his uncle; and the next instant they were aground, sure enough.

"I kept her just straight," said Rob, rather sharply, "but there was a turn in the river!"

"And when the mountain would n't go to Mahomet —" laughed Mr. Meredith.

Rob smiled too, and was good-natured in a moment. "To tell the truth, I was watching you so intently that I did not look at the bank," he said to his uncle.

"Now we are going to turn, and then look out for breakers," was his uncle's gay reply.

Rob acquitted himself with much skill, and they went on smoothly. He began to understand the philosophy of it.

"But suppose there was only one in the boat?" he asked.

"O, you can steer very well with the oar, and if you choose you can unship the rudder."

"Conover," said Mr. Meredith, "let me take a hand. Your arms must ache."

"On the contrary, I feel quite at home. I have had so much of this work for the last dozen years that it is not much more exertion than driving."

"Still it's a long pull, and I'll ease you a little. When you see me looking faint and weary, you may hasten to my rescue."

So they changed places, and Mr. Meredith being fresh they hurried along with new vigor. The wind had fallen, but it was a very lovely evening, for the moon rose early, and her soft rays began to steal through the gray twilight.

"Just the time for a song," said Mr. Meredith.

Rob thought he had never heard anything so beautiful as the blending of these mellow voices on the water; and as it grew duskier the trees took on a more shadowy appearance, until it seemed as if they must be clothed with foliage.

"Would n't it be splendid to go off on a boating tour?" Rob exclaimed. "You might stop and encamp somewhere at night."

"It's rare fun sometimes," Mr. Meredith answered, "if you do not have too much rain."

"Why can't we take such a trip in the summer, Uncle Robert?"

"Well, I suppose we might."

"When you give out your invitations, count me in, Rob," said Mr. Meredith.

"I surely will."

They came in the shade of the hills, and knew by that they were nearing home. It was beginning to grow quite cool, and Rob shivered.

"Suppose you come over here and take a hand at the oars," Mr. Meredith exclaimed, presently, for he had remarked the wistful look in the boy's face.

"O, I shall be delighted!" and Rob scrambled over.

They were entering Silver Lake. Mr. Conover steered them around, and Rob took the oar.

"Did you ever row any?"

"No, but I think I can soon learn."

Mr. Meredith explained the process very simply. He gave three or four slow strokes, so that Rob might see, for now it was nearly as light as day.

"O, I know," said Rob. "Why, it is very easy!"

He dipped his oar and it went down as if there was a ton's weight at the end, then he jerked it up with a splash that sent the water over him, and slipped the oar out of the row-lock.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Rather too powerful that time. Try again."

The next was a very moderate effort that accomplished nothing. When the oar was in the water he could not govern it at all, and if he raised it the least trifle, it seemed, it was on the surface.

"There 's a knack in it," he admitted, presently ;
"but it looks so easy."

"So it is when you know how. Now try it again with me, — steady !"

Alas for the steady ! Rob stirred up another great commotion in the water. Rather vexed at his want of skill, he made a quick, impatient stroke as a vent for the flash of temper.

"That is it."

"Is it ? Well, I don't know how it was done."

"Try again."

Rob tried in every imaginable manner, but there was very little rowing in it. He could n't seem to get "the hang of it." "It is harder than I thought, and the strokes don't come out at all as you fancy they will."

"I believe I spent about a day in learning, so don't be discouraged."

"And you, Uncle Robert ?"

"I took to the water naturally. Our summers were passed on Long Island when I was a child, and my first experience dates so far back that I cannot remember. You 'll see into it better by daylight."

Rob made several more efforts that were not crowned with brilliant success, he was forced to admit, and he sadly relinquished the oar, for he found that he was doing more harm than good. Then Mr. Meredith gave a few long, quick strokes, and they were at home.

"We have a boat-house, anyhow," exclaimed Rob, as if some consolation were necessary.

"But I have n't the key. However, there 's no danger of robbers ; we 'll just fasten it to a stake."

That was soon done, and they walked up to the house. Rob felt a little cramped and stiff from sitting so long.

"O," exclaimed Kathie, running down the steps, "we could n't think what had become of you. I went over to the station to meet the train. Why, it 's eight o'clock !"

"We rowed home ; at least I did n't row any, but it was splendid !"

"You did n't bring the boat ?"

"To be sure, or rather it brought us. It's a beauty."

"Come in," said Mrs. Alston; "I should think you would all be in a shiver, for it's chilly, and especially on the water. We began to wonder how you would get home."

CHAPTER V.

MISS JESSIE'S NAMESAKE.

It was delightful in the warm, lighted room, and the three travellers drew a long breath of satisfaction.

"And so you really have a boat?" exclaimed Kathie, in a wondering tone. "Is it pretty? and what is it named?"

"Guess!" laughed Rob, holding up his hand to his uncle.

"I don't know much about boats' names."

"But what would you like?"

"There was one called Vixen," Mr. Meredith said, by way of assistance.

"O, that 's ugly, and sounds like ill-temper."

"And the Sylph."

"That does better. Is that it, Rob?"

"No, indeed; guess, as I told you."

Kathie began and enumerated the names of all the boys, girls, horses, cats, and birds that she could remember.

"You 've left out one important friend."

"Not Miss Jessie?"

Uncle Robert took a roll from his pocket and shook it out. A pennon made of red bunting, with "Jessie" in white letters.

"O, is n't that odd, or did you have it painted afterward?"

"No, it was already named," said Mr. Meredith.

"And what a surprise it will be to Miss Jessie! Can't you take us out in it, Uncle Robert?"

"Yes, to-morrow. I expect that Rob will be the owner of the boat presently. If his school year ends satisfactorily, for I think he has tried in many things to please me, it will be his then."

Rob was quite elated. He had not felt altogether sure, though he had announced the fact at school.

They made themselves ready and soon assembled at the table. Fred asked countless questions, and Rob gave an entertaining account of their voyage in a rather grandiloquent style, especially about his learning to steer.

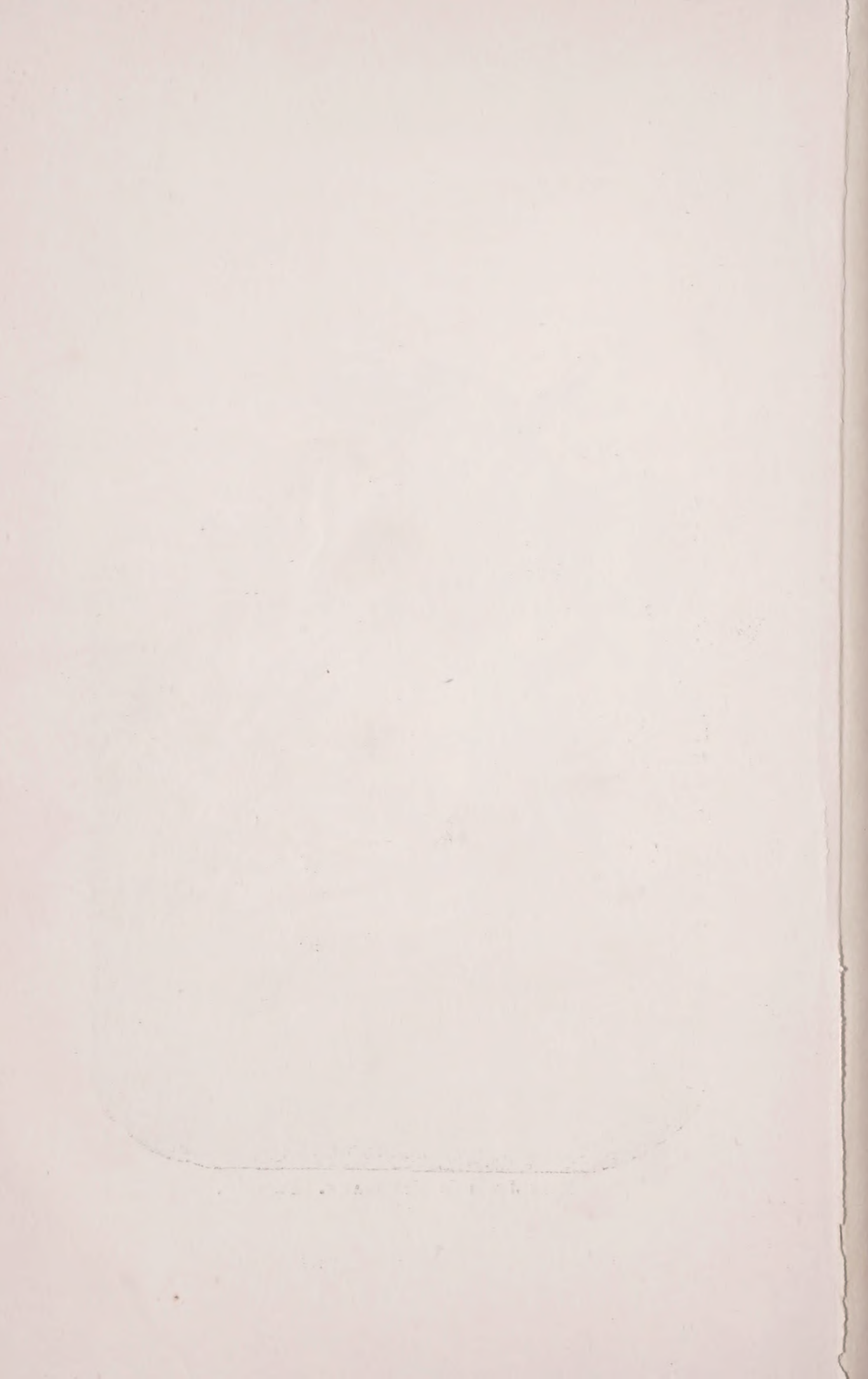
"Why did n't you learn to row?" asked Kathie.

Both Rob and Mr. Meredith laughed.

"It is n't as easy as it looks," he said.



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"It seems to me that I could do it. You just put your oar in the water, and do so —" and Kathie made a motion with her hand. "Miss Jessie can row."

"I'd like to see *you* try," Rob returned, rather indignantly.

"I'll take a lesson to-morrow."

Rob lingered over the register for a while, warming himself and wondering whether he had better get out his books or not, and presently grew very sleepy. Mr. Meredith went to invite Miss Jessie over for the next day, though Kathie gave a queer little smile as he announced his errand.

"I think I'll go to bed," was Rob's next announcement, for he was beginning to nod in his chair.

He did n't have a single dream about the Jessie, though he had to run down to the boat-house before breakfast to see if she was all safe and as pretty as he thought her last night. Indeed, he fell in love with her over again. She looked so clean and bright that he could hardly resist the temptation to jump in and flounder about awhile. A step startled him, and turning he beheld Kathie.

"O," she exclaimed, in a delighted tone, "is n't it pretty! I hope Miss Jessie will come over real early, for I am impatient to take a row."

"Hang the school!" said Rob; "I wish it was vacation. You have all the luck and nice times, with nothing to do."

"But I have a two hours' music practice every day, and I sometimes get very tired of it, much as I like it."

"Ho! What's that to a dozen lessons! School's a humbug, that's my private opinion. But, Kathie, I should n't wonder if we went off on a pleasure excursion some time and were gone a whole week. Would n't it be jolly? Catching fish and cooking them, and broiling birds over coals, and all that!"

"Would we all go?"

"Of course not you girls. How could you camp out?" And Rob felt immensely gratified in thinking there was one point in which Kathie's pleasures could not exceed his.

"But ladies do sometimes. Mrs. Havens went to the Delaware Water Gap with a party, and they walked ever so much, and had their dinners in the wood, and stayed all night at farm-houses."

"Humph!" was Rob's rather disdainful rejoinder.

Kathie began to inspect the Jessie more closely. The inside was painted white and pearl-color, and glistened in the morning sun.

"I'm so glad you have it," she said, in her cheery tone. "I hope you will take ever so much comfort in it. It's next best to having a horse."

"I don't know but it's better."

They took another survey of the boat-house, and then walked slowly up the lawn again. When they entered the breakfast-room the family were seated at the table.

"Well, runaway," said Mr. Meredith to Kathie, "we did not know but that you had embarked for China. Has the boat been stolen, Master Robin?"

That made Freddy laugh. "Why, he can't hop about or fly up in the trees," he said.

"I think I've seen him do a pretty good share of hopping and standing on one foot, and as for flying, I've seen him in the top of many a tree."

"But he had n't any wings."

"Boys manage to fly without them."

Freddy stopped to solve this knotty problem.

"The boat is beautiful," exclaimed Kathie. "Did you tell Miss Jessie, Mr. Meredith?"

"Yes, I announced to her that we had a remarkable curiosity over here that was neither beast, bird, nor reptile. Admittance six cents, and here's the

money"; with which he very gravely laid it beside Kathie's plate.

"You did n't tell her all that, and she did not give you the money?"

"I told her that it brought us up from Connor's Point, although it had n't a foot to walk on, and she thought it must be either an elephant or an ostrich."

Kathie laughed heartily.

"Why can't we have an elephant?" asked Fred. "He will watch little children all day. I read it in my book, and he spirted a great lot of water over a tailor."

"Do you think we ought to have one to watch you?" his mother questioned, with a smile.

"He would be handy for a shower-bath too," suggested Mr. Meredith.

It was quite early, and Rob wanted to coax his uncle to go out on the lake for half an hour. It would be such a long while to wait until three this afternoon, and likely as not he and Mr. Meredith would go off somewhere. But there were three lessons! He stood by the window very undecided, for conscience said "Lessons first."

It was a great trial, but he made the effort. Marching off up stairs, and sitting down by the tower window that overlooked the lake, he gave each one fifteen minutes' serious attention.

"That's better," he said, with a little triumph; "but O, what fun they will have, and I shall not be here!"

Poor Rob! It almost seemed as if the boat would not last until afternoon, but still he trudged off to school with a cheerful good morning. Every day counted, that was his greatest comfort.

Miss Jessie was not to come over until after luncheon. Kathie took her hour's practice, and then went out to consider the state of the garden. It actually seemed warm enough to begin work, she thought. Mr. Morrison was walking around with his large pruning-shears.

"It's coming summer," exclaimed Kathie, hopefully; "don't you think we could have the straw taken off our roses, Mr. Morrison, and this litter carried away? I do so long to see the beds look neat and fresh once more."

"One swallow does n't make a summer," he replied, gravely.

"But there have been blue-birds and martins and robins," she said, in a little triumph.

"But I dare say we shall have snow again. The roses are tender and would feel rather chilly without their cloak."

"But there are ever so many flowers in the woods."

"Every one according to his kind and time. There may be some here. Look around the borders."

Kathie ran for her small flower-rake and began stirring amongst the straw. "O, here's something coming up," she exclaimed, delightedly.

Mr. Morrison looked. "That's hyacinth, and this border is jonquil; and O, look at the tulips!"

"How can you tell them?"

"They grow in a different manner, you see; and the tulips have a faint, bluish tinge. Look here, Miss Kathie."

She hurried round. There was a row of little vases, that seemed to be standing on the ground. White, waxen, shaded by two slender green leaves, that were just the height of the flower; and here purple, yellow, and a faint peachy color.

"O, crocuses!" she said, after a moment's thought. "How lovely they are, the little darlings! I must go find Aunt Ruth."

Aunt Ruth soon came out, and was as delighted as Kathie. Here were hardy pansies peeping up, so dark a green that they seemed almost black.

"I think we might have them uncovered," Kathie said, "it would make the place look so much prettier."

"In a week's time, or less, we shall have snow."

"How can you tell?"

"Well, old-fashioned people call such days as yesterday and to-day weather-breeders."

"What does that mean?" asked Kathie, curiously.

"I suppose it means that such pleasant days and soft, summery airs are unseasonable, and that we generally have a cold snap afterward."

"But it may not snow."

"I think it will."

"It's a shame to spoil the bright days by such dismal forebodings. Don't you think so, Aunt Ruth?"

"O, I don't spoil them, Miss Kathie," said Mr. Morrison, earnestly; "I give thanks for every one, and I'm as fond of the sunshine as the blue-birds; but you remember the story of the two who mated so early in the season, and how their young ones

perished amid the March blasts, and the old ones, I believe, laid the blame on each other for being so hasty. So we will not uncover the tender flowers too soon. It's always safest to do your early gardening under a glass."

"In a hot-bed?"

"Yes, or cold-frame for hardier things. Do you want to come and take a look at mine?"

"O yes."

Kathie and Aunt Ruth walked to the vegetable garden. Several of the beds were covered with frames.

"O," exclaimed Kathie, "here are some peas coming up! Two long, straight rows, — look, Aunt Ruth!"

"Yes, I've had these uncovered through the middle of the day; and here's my asparagus. This is a bed of early spinach that was planted last August."

"But what is this high one?" asked Kathie.

"This is my hot-bed. We'll soon have lettuce and radishes. Most of the others are for planting out as the weather grows warm."

"And here are strawberries in blossom!"

"Yes, some have set already. I think we will have a dish of strawberries early in May. I just did this for an experiment. And now, Miss Kathie, if you would like to have a little corner, you might plant some flower-seeds."

"I believe I have n't anything but mignonette and sweet-peas and portulaca."

"We must look over the catalogue and send for some seeds," said Aunt Ruth; "I expect to do a little gardening myself next summer."

Kathie ran for her seeds while Mr. Morrison arranged a corner for her.

"When will they come up?" she asked.

"In about ten days, except the portulaca, which always takes its own time."

"I don't know what this is," she exclaimed, handing a tiny paper to Mr. Morrison; "it was n't labelled."

"O, that 's pansy! Now we will try a florist's experiment, and perhaps raise enough for a whole bed."

He took an old basket and went to the cow-yard for some compost, and stirred it all up in the earth.

"Perhaps we had better plant them in little pots. I believe I have some around."

He found twenty and filled them. "Now put two seeds in each one," he said to Kathie.

"Why just two?"

"Because one may not come up. If both are lucky enough to be perfect and hardy, we can transplant, you know."

"They are such tiny little things. I wonder if there are forty of them?"

There were only thirty-seven.

"Now, we will see what comes of that. You have done considerable gardening this morning, Miss Kathie."

The little girl laughed gayly, well pleased. Then they returned to the house, and as it was but a little after eleven she went back to her piano, and was through by lunch-time. Mrs. Alston had been out during the morning.

"Kathie," she began, "I am going to ask your assistance. Mrs. Gardiner mentioned a very poor woman, who moved into the old house of Mr. Ketcham and I went to see her. Her husband had been out of work for a long while, but has gone into Mr. Gordon's hat-factory. There are five little children, and they have not a decent change of clothing."

"That 's poorer than we ever were, mamma."

"Your papa left some money when he died, or we might have suffered. This poor creature seems a worthy woman, and her rooms looked quite tidy. I stopped at the store and bought some muslin, and I think we can find a few old garments to alter over. You may get the machine ready, and I 'll cut awhile."

"It 's such a good thing to have this little iron woman," Kathie said, gayly, as she unlocked the case and began putting it in order.

Mrs. Alston cut out two suits of underclothing apiece. The eldest child was eleven and the youngest a babe of two months.

It was not deemed prudent for Aunt Ruth to try the machine just yet, and Kathie looked upon it as a kind of play ; so she seated herself and soon had it whizzing and whirring. Aunt Ruth and her mother cut and arranged, and Kathie sewed away until Miss Jessie came.

It seemed to her that Miss Jessie grew prettier every day. Her cheeks were such a soft lovely pink and her eyes so tender and bright.

Mrs. Alston repeated the story of the poor woman

she had found, and Miss Jessie was very much interested.

"I 'll run over and see her to-morrow," she said.

"And now, my dear Kathie, you may be dismissed. I am ever so much obliged to you"; and Mrs. Alston kissed the soft scarlet lips.

Kathie ran to find Uncle Robert and Mr. Meredith, but they were not far. Then they all had to go and see the crocuses.

"Why, I must look at mine," exclaimed Miss Jessie. "I have not once thought of them. Was this the remarkable sight? It is very beautiful"; and she glanced at Mr. Meredith curiously.

He laughed a little.

"No," began Kathie, eagerly, "this is not it."

"He made me guess everything under the sun last night," she said, with a mirthful yet perplexed expression.

"O, there were two or three things that you did not mention."

"I did think of an elephant, though."

"And now Freddy is most desirous of adding one to his stock of pets. He sounded me privately this morning upon the probable cost."

They all laughed.

"Suppose we take a shawl or two. Kathie, can you find some?"

Kathie ran into the house and soon emerged with Aunt Ruth and two comfortable plaids.

"I'll marshal the company," said Uncle Robert, taking his niece by the hand.

Down the winding lawn path and through the shrubbery to the water's edge. The red streamer had been fastened to the staff and was flying gayly.

"O, a boat! Why, I might have thought of that the first thing. And of course you rowed up from Connor's Point?"

Mr. Meredith gave a gay, ringing laugh. He had mystified Miss Jessie very much.

"Now we will take a row around Silver Lake."

"Did you have it named purposely for me?" she asked.

"That was quite an accident, though I am not sure but that the name decided us," Uncle Robert answered.

"They made me guess that," said Kathie, "and the oddest of all was that I left yours till the very last."

"We must have some cushions to fit," Uncle Robert declared. "I 'll send over to Weston's tomorrow. These are from the carriage and may not be altogether comfortable, but it is the best that I can do at present."

He seated the ladies in the stern, placing Miss Jessie at the tiller. They assured him that they were very comfortable. Then Mr. Meredith faced them on the next seat.

"That will hardly do, after all. Suppose you come over to me, Kathie, and take a lesson in the art of rowing?"

She was delighted with that.

"Now we are properly balanced, I believe. Where will you go, — to the Indian Ocean or the Mediterranean Sea?"

"Or Araby the Blest," said Miss Jessie, laughing. "And there is the Fountain of Youth still to be discovered."

"Is it?" and an odd, half-sad, half-questioning look crossed Uncle Robert's face. "I think some have found it, in heart and soul at least."

"Yes," she answered, seriously, "we can all do that."

It seemed to Aunt Ruth as if she had made the discovery, or, better still, gone back to a fairer and happier youth, — days of deeper and fuller satisfaction, though not so gay, perhaps. The

“ . . . something sweet
That follows youth with flying feet ”

passes for all time in those early days ; but is there nothing precious left ?

“ How very lovely ! ” Miss Jessie exclaimed, in her soft voice. “ I shall be tempted to pay you many a visit this summer. Kathie, we can go out by ourselves. But who is to be the proprietor of the boat ? ”

“ Robert,” answered his uncle. “ At vacation he comes into full possession.”

“ We shall have to be very sweet and amiable to Captain Alston then.”

“ Who taught you to row, Miss Jessie ? ” asked Kathie.

“ O, some cousins who live up the Hudson. I was at school there two years ago.”

“ Will you try ? ” said Uncle Robert. “ You will have to take both hands, and you should have gloves.”

He showed her how to hold the oar and just how deep to dip it. She succeeded very well indeed.

"Hillo! Ahoy there!" sang out a voice in the distance. It was Rob, who had made a speaking-trumpet of his hands.

Uncle Robert rowed quickly in to the shore, and the boy sprang on board. Kathie took the seat beside Mr. Meredith.

"Now, Rob, for a second lesson," said that gentleman.

"I've been thinking it over all day. It's just like a tune floating through my brain. I believe I can do it."

"And the lessons?" asked his uncle, in a low tone.

"First-rate, every one. O, I went up stairs this morning and put them through sharp."

"I missed you, and thought you were down to the boat-house. I am glad that you had that much self-control, my boy."

Rob answered the loving smile by one as bright. Then he took the oar. The first stroke was a success, and he followed it by half a dozen equally good.

"Capital, Master Rob!" exclaimed Mr. Meredith. "There's the right ring to that music!"

Rob was much elated. To be sure, now and then he made a false stroke and splashed the water, but on the whole it was very fair rowing. They went all around Silver Lake. In some places the willows began to take on a tint of silvery green, the first suggestion of budding out. Some of the sedge-grasses and water-plants were thrusting up buds and slender spires.

They had a gay time talking and laughing, and at length reached the tiny dock, where the ladies were handed out in great state by Mr. Meredith. Rob was to stay and try both oars.

He found this much more difficult, and very slow work, and presently his arms began to ache.

"That is enough for one day, Rob," said his uncle. "You 'll soon be master of the situation."

Rob gave a confident and delighted nod.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW FREDDY WENT TO SEA.

THE Jessie bade fair to overshadow all other interests. The academy boys must come and see it, and the children from the district school took in Silver Lake as a short cut homeward. Rob was very proud indeed. There was nothing like it this side of Guilford River, he was sure.

Mr. Meredith coaxed Kathie to hire him as gardener, so that he might have an excuse to stay. They made hourly excursions to the crocus border and the hot-bed, and Kathie watched the little pots as nothing ever was watched before. One day they went to the woods and gathered a quantity of wild-flowers, and then Kathie could not resist cutting some of the beautiful crocuses.

There had been a week of very pleasant weather, and Kathie treated Mr. Morrison's snow-storm as a rather wild prediction. But at noon it clouded over, and the wind blew up raw and cold, so Kathie

thought it prudent to cover the borders, especially as she found Mr. Morrison putting some old matting over the hot-bed.

The evening within was so bright and genial that she forgot all about it, and great was her surprise the next morning to find everything covered with snow. The trees were lovely. The evergreens to the smallest branch were draped with ermine, and the house gables were hooded with an overhanging edge of purest white. Every shrub or point of any kind had its tuft of snowy fleece.

Fred was in ecstasies, and thought that it would do for sleighing. At all events, there would be some fine old snowballing !

“ And fine wet feet ! ” said his mother.

“ I can't see what made you think that it would snow ! ” Kathie remarked to Mr. Morrison.

“ There is generally one snow-storm in April, if no more, so that may be considered a tolerably safe prediction. But I believe we can count upon spring now.”

Aunt Ruth and Kathie studied a catalogue of plants and annuals, and made some selections. Uncle Robert had put out a great many hardy

bulbs and roses the preceding fall, so that they had nothing to do but to spring up and grow.

"But you ought to have a nice collection of monthly roses as well," Mr. Meredith said. "Even the so-called perpetual roses rarely blossom more than twice during the summer."

"We have a daily rose."

"Very pretty, but of course the blossoms do not keep. I wish there was a greenhouse near."

Kathie was very sorry to have him go, but he said that he waited until the last moment to see if she would not make him some kind of a generous offer.

"I can't do anything better than to ask you to come often and stay a long while," she said, laughingly.

A few days after his departure she received a little note, asking her to take Mr. Morrison and the wagon and go over to the station. Full of curiosity they started at once.

Upon inquiring at the express-office she found that two boxes were awaiting her, and a parcel. The former were fastened with slats at the top, and at the first glance Kathie gave a cry of joy.

“The loveliest flowers you ever saw!” she said to Mr. Morrison. “I can hardly wait until I get home for a nearer view of them.”

He lifted them both into the wagon, and Kathie took the parcel in her lap. That was a secondary consideration.

“We can go to gardening in good earnest now,” Mr. Morrison said. “Have you looked at your pansies?”

“Not to-day nor yesterday. Hannah laughed at me, and told me that ‘a watched pot never boils,’ so I thought I would wait a few days.”

“I counted twenty-four up this morning; and the mignonette has started.”

“That is royal!” she said, delightedly; “I wonder if they will be all of one color?”

“I guess not.”

“I shall have such a splendid garden! It was so kind in Mr. Meredith to send all these.”

Uncle Robert was at hand, and they were opened by the kitchen porch. They were very nicely packed to keep them from being crushed, and when the top slats were taken off they presented one mass of elegant bloom. Kathie drew a long breath, inhaling the fragrance.

One by one they were handed out. White, red, pink, pale salmon, and pale lemon-color, the tops of the pots covered with moss to keep them from drying out. Kathie could only look and exclaim. "And here is the loveliest purple heliotrope in the world, I do believe; and O, look, Uncle Robert! — a perfectly white one!"

"They are very elegant indeed, and fine, thrifty plants. It will not do to put them out of doors just yet."

"Then let us take them to Aunt Ruth's room."

"We will see what is in the other before we begin."

Two or three choice roses and several beautiful monthly carnations, an artillery plant, and some very odd things that Kathie had never seen before.

"Look at this beautiful red leaf, — it is as soft as velvet! And O, this magnificent purple and green — what is it?"

"Gloxiana," the label said, and the other was a "Coleus."

"A grand variety, surely. We shall have to invite Mr. Meredith down to spend a month."

"And feast him on roses," Kathie said, laughingly.

Uncle Robert found a large table and had it taken up stairs. Afterward they had a procession of flowers. Aunt Ruth was nearly as extravagant as Kathie in her protestations of joy.

"O, here's my bundle!" exclaimed Kathie, that evening; "why, I had almost forgotten it!"

The under wrapper was addressed to Miss Jessie Darrell.

"It is too bad that I did not look before and send it over to her," she said, regretfully; "I'll do it the first thing in the morning."

So Kathie had a shorter talk than usual with Gypsy, who seemed to ask why he could n't go out of doors with his mistress on this sunshiny morning, and find some stray worm or insect. I am not sure but she kissed the flowers all round, and then she set off for a walk.

She found Miss Jessie in a broad-brimmed sun-hat and thick gloves, pruning and tying up roses and vines. She told her about her bundle and her gift of flowers.

"O, it was of no immediate importance, and I shall have to tell you, for you must help me a little. Come in the house and we will open it."

"Why, what is all this blue for? And — a pair of trousers — sailor's!"

"Yes, for Rob, and the flannel is for a shirt; so that he will have a pretty costume. I spoke of it one day, and Mr. Meredith took up the idea immediately. It is to be his gift. I had a little note from him yesterday, and he said he could not find a shirt as pretty as he wanted, so he bought the material. Here is a collar pattern and the braid; and O, look at these anchors in white cord!"

"How very generous he is!" Kathie said, slowly.
"Miss Jessie —"

"Well?"

"I think I ought to send you some of my flowers."

"Why?"

Kathie glanced up timidly, with a bright color in her face. As Miss Jessie met the soft eyes, she blushed too, and for a moment seemed quite awkward. Then she gave a little confused laugh. "O, never mind," she said; "I have some very pretty ones, you know. And now, if I come over to your house, will your mother cut this out, so that we may be certain of having it fit nicely?"

"She will be very glad to do it, I am sure."

"Come into the greenhouse and see my plants ; and how is Gypsy this morning ? "

"As cunning and lovely as ever. Miss Jessie, I almost believe that I am in fairy-land."

"Why ? " with a smile.

"Because such delightful things keep happening to me continually."

"And you are such a dear little girl that it is a pleasure to bestow gifts upon you. Now you must go and see grandmother a moment."

Altogether, Kathie made quite a long stay ; but she insisted upon taking the parcel back again, though she promised to keep the secret faithfully.

"Twenty-nine pansies, Miss Kathie," said Mr. Morrison, stopping her in the drive ; "I call that pretty good seed."

So she must run to the hot-bed and look at them. A tiny stalk half an inch high, with two round dark-green leaves, not much larger than a pin's head. The idea of their ever growing into anything !

"They are so very little," she said.

"There 's plenty of room for them to grow larger. You 'll have a nice bed."

The mignonette had thrust up a spire of pale, delicate green, and seemed to give more promise.

"I suppose everything has to be small in the beginning," she said, with a smile.

The tulip-bed was coming on finely, but the crocuses were looking a trifle faded. Their glory would soon be over.

She ran into the house and told her mother about the gift Rob was to have. Then she looked her flowers carefully over, and, as there were some very nearly alike, she decided that she would share them with Miss Jessie, for somehow it almost seemed as if Mr. Meredith must have meant part for her.

They were busy enough at Cedarwood after this. Kathie was out of doors every spare moment. Freddy was seized with a garden mania too, and Mr. Morrison gave him a plot of ground to plant as he liked.

"What do you think you will raise?" asked his uncle.

Fred buried his fingers in his hair meditatively, and looked at the nearest pine. "Strawberries, for one thing," he said, slowly, "and peaches, I guess."

Rob laughed. He could think of nothing but the boat, and every afternoon he brought one or more boys home with him to take a row. Jasper was

quite thrown in the shade, and missed his young master a good deal. He was always very glad to see Kathie, and whinnied gratefully when he heard her voice.

And so they came into May. The season was early in spite of the April snow, and the spiræas were showing white blossoms. The fruit-trees, too, were budded, and the evergreens gave out the peculiar fragrance of the new growth. It seemed to Kathie that the world had never been half so lovely as now, and she kept continually finding something new.

"Where is Freddy?" Mrs. Alston said late one afternoon. "Kathie, run over to the barn and see if you can find him. It will soon be supper-time."

As the days had grown longer they had changed their dinner-hour back to noon, an arrangement that pleased Hannah much better.

Kathie took quite an extended ramble, but no Freddy could she find, so she asked Mr. Morrison.

"I saw him as he came from school, and he has not been around here since. It seems to me that he went toward the boat-house."

Kathie was down there in a minute. The boat was out.

"Perhaps Rob took him," she said to mamma.

Rob flew in the house presently, whistling Pat Malloy, washed his face and hands and brushed his hair.

"Where is Freddy?" asked his mother.

"I don't know; I have n't seen him."

"I shall make him go without his supper," exclaimed Mrs. Alston. "He is getting out of his regular habits."

They sat down and ate leisurely. By this time it was growing dusk. Rob happened to say something about Dick Grayson and what they had been doing that afternoon.

"Were n't you out in the boat?" asked Kathie, quickly.

"No,—or only a little while this morning."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Alston, with a quick cry, "the boat's gone. And Freddy—"

"It can't be, mamma. He could not get it loose."

"Did you fasten it securely this morning?" asked his uncle.

"Yes, I'm sure"; and then he thought a moment. He had been in a great hurry, for it was quite late, and now had he really fastened it, or carelessly

thrown the chain over the stake? For his life he could not remember.

"I 'll go down and see," said Uncle Robert.

Kathie's heart beat with a quick fear.

Rob put on his hat to accompany his uncle. He slipped his hand softly within the larger one.

"I don't feel quite positive," he began as they were walking down the lawn-path. "I was in a hurry, for I did n't want to be late at school."

"You know I told you to fasten it securely always."

That was all Uncle Robert said, for he knew his nephew's pain would be bitterly keen if any accident happened.

There was no boat, sure enough. The chain, too, was gone.

"You do not think any of the boys would have taken it without permission?"

"No, I don't believe they would."

"I am afraid then."

"Freddy is always in some mischief," said Rob, in a complaining tone.

"I am not sure that he has been forbidden to get into the boat. I fancy we have never thought of it."

"What can we do?" was Rob's anxious query.

"We must get some men and go out with lanterns. We shall be sure to find the boat somewhere."

A great chill struck Rob's heart then. It had not entered his mind before but that Freddy was safe enough. Two summers ago he had seen a little drowned boy about Freddy's age. He remembered the half-closed eyes, the wet, hanging hair, and swollen, pallid face; and though he was a plague and trouble they all loved him, and he had many sweet, cunning ways. It would break mamma's heart to lose him.

Mrs. Alston came down the walk to meet them. "Is it gone?" she asked.

"Yes," in a grave, quiet tone.

"O Robert, what can we do?" and her voice was almost hysterical.

"My dearest Dora, do not give way to wild alarm. He may be safe."

"O Robert, it is n't possible! He must have been out nearly three hours. He could n't float around in that little shell all this time."

"Yes, he might; that is my hope."

Rob grasped his uncle's hand, though he felt like crying. If it was daylight it would n't seem half so bad.

“Rob, go and tell Mr. Morrison to saddle the horses and get out both lanterns. I’ll see Mr. Adams and some of the neighbors.”

Mr. Adams lived in the first house above, — a quiet, middle-aged man. His wife’s brother was making them a visit, and the two were ready to start at once.

“Is the tide going out or coming in?” asked Mr. Langdon.

“It changed at three, I think, and is out, though the current is not very strong.”

“It would take the boat out, though.”

“Yes.”

“And it has been gone about three hours. How do you propose to search?”

“There is a boat about a mile and a half below, the nearest one. We must get that and go out. Some one might ride round the lake with a lantern. Our horses are ready.”

“We might do that, Langdon, we have two,” said Mr. Adams. “We will start immediately, and go round the farther side.”

“Thanks.”

Two or three others were alarmed, and then Uncle Robert hurried back.

"If you are going to Browne's you may as well take the wagon," said Hugh, and in a twinkling the horses were changed. Jasper and Hero almost flew along the road, and it seemed to Rob that he had hardly drawn a breath before they reached their destination.

The matter was soon explained to Mr. Browne, and the boat was out in a jiffy. Rob and his uncle, Hugh Morrison, Mr. Browne and his two boys, made up the company.

"I'd go down first," said Jephthah, who was commonly called Jep. "A boat floats faster 'n you'd think."

"No, let us go up to the lake first," proposed Uncle Robert.

They rowed the distance in a few moments, turning their lanterns toward the shore,—not a sign of a boat to be seen. Farther up flashed some stray lights, but though they looked long and steadily they discerned nothing.

"You had better go down," persisted Jep.

They headed the boat round and started rapidly on another tack. After they had passed Mr. Browne's the search began again. The river was so narrow they could see both shores easily.

Rob was holding a lantern, and with every breath a great lump rose in his throat, threatening to strangle him. Was poor little Freddy lying at the bottom of the river, tangled among the weeds? For it seemed hardly possible that he could have kept still enough to remain in the boat, — the venturesome little fellow that he was!

Jep was in the bow looking straight down the river. "Hillo!" he cried, presently. "There's the boat, sure as guns!"

Rob strained his eyes to look. They steered around, for it seemed to be stationary.

"Aground! Now if the youngster's —" and Mr. Browne threw his hook.

"Oh!" and Rob uttered a cry as he grasped his uncle's arm, not daring to look.

"Safe, by the great boot!"

Mr. Browne, being a fisherman, was given to much stronger expressions, but he stood a trifle in awe of a gentleman like Mr. Conover.

Rob's eyes were so full of tears that he could not see at first, and his whole frame trembled violently. He nearly dropped the lantern overboard.

"Asleep!" exclaimed Uncle Robert. "Thank God

for his preservation!" and he bowed his head in gratitude for an instant.

There he was in the bottom of the boat, his head resting on his arm, and his round, rosy face upturned with as peaceful an expression as if he were in his little bed. Rob thought he had never seen him look so sweet, and he was quite sure that he had never loved him half so well.

"We will row back, I think," Mr. Conover said, "if you will lend us a pair of oars. You can stop and drive home, Hugh."

They took the boat in tow, and at Mr. Browne's made a change, Rob and his uncle stepping over into their own. He took Freddy in his arms, as his uncle meant to row.

The child gave a yawn and muttered something, but was soon sound asleep again.

"Poor little fellow!" said Rob, softly. "I wonder if he was much frightened? I never was so glad of anything in my life as to see him safe."

"I was very, very thankful," was the answer, in a tone of deep emotion.

"There is some one on the bank," Rob exclaimed.

"All right and safe!" called out Uncle Robert, in a strong, cheerful tone.

The lights glanced a moment among the bushes, and then the riders turned. Rob could not help thinking how pretty it looked to see a stray gleam now and then, for there was no moon, although the stars were bright.

“And the tower is illuminated,” he said, as they came in sight, for a long line of light shone over the lake.

Then he was silent, for Uncle Robert was rowing slowly and softly. The coming home might have been so different.

A voice called from the boat-house. It was Kathie’s, for her mother could not speak.

“He’s safe!” shouted Rob, in great triumph, thankful that he could say it.

CHAPTER VII.

KATHIE'S GARDENING.

"COME, little man, wake up!" exclaimed Uncle Robert, reaching over to Freddy, whose head still rested in his brother's arms.

"O—oh!" and the little one drew a long breath.

"Come, Freddy, here 's mamma and Kathie!"

Uncle Robert fastened the boat and lifted him out, but before his eyes were fairly opened his mother had covered his face with kisses. For the last hour she had been suffering great mental agony, and picturing her child cold and lifeless. All her impatience, her lack of any motherly duty or warning, rose up before her much exaggerated by her passionate grief, for even in her hardest and most wearisome days she had been truly thoughtful and conscientious.

"O dear! what do you want me to get up for?" began Freddy, with a half-cry. "It 's all dark, and I know it is n't morning!"

Kathie laughed.

"Why, you 've been out to sea!" said Rob.

"Like the three wise men of Gotham, in a bowl," his uncle rejoined, gayly, as he slid the oars into their rack under the shed of the boat-house.

Freddy stopped short. "Why, mamma," he said, in a tone of great surprise, "I went out in Rob's boat, and it got loose, and floated 'way, 'way off! I could n't come back again and I cried, — and I 'm so tired and hungry!"

"That 's Fred all over. He must have been born hungry," was Rob's comment.

Fred stumbled and clung to his uncle, who took him up in his arms. Rob slipped his hand within his mother's, and gave it a tender little pressure. So the procession wended its way toward the house.

"Mamma," said Rob, falling a trifle behind the others, "I want to talk to you."

"Well, my son"; and as she leaned on Rob's arm there seemed a strange sweet sense of manliness and protection about him, at once grateful and touching to her heart.

"Mamma dear, now that we have Freddy back safe, will you please not punish him? It *was* my

fault, for I did n't fasten the boat, and uncle said he had not been forbidden to go there."

Anything like this was very unusual on Rob's part. Generally, if Freddy did wrong, he was quite willing to have him suffer for it, and very ready to complain of him.

"Will you, mamma?"

The voice was so soft and pleading, and she almost guessed that there were tears in Rob's eyes.

"Freddy ought to know some things without always being told. But if you wish it so much —"

"O mamma, I felt so dreadfully before we had found him. It seemed to me that I was all to blame, and just as we looked into the boat I thought I should strangle, there was such a choking in my throat. When I caught sight of his dear little face my heart gave a bound, and I felt as if I had never loved him before. I can't tell you —" and the boyish voice faltered through tears.

"My dear, dear Rob!"

She stooped and kissed him in the darkness. Indeed, it seemed as if Rob had never loved any of them half so well before.

Aunt Ruth was waiting on the porch, and two or

three of the neighbors had come in. There were some heartfelt congratulations, and Freddy became quite confused amidst the kissing and questions. Then Mr. Adams and Mr. Langdon arrived.

"Well, young sailor," said the former, pinching Freddy's cheek, "you have given us quite an excitement and a rather romantic search. You can't tell, Mr. Conover, how glad I was to hear your cheerful voice. It seems a perfect miracle that the child knew enough to keep in the boat, when a little fear, or even an attempt to save himself, as youngsters usually do, might have cost his life. How did you come to keep so still?"

"I was afraid of getting drown-ded," said Freddy, with a good deal of complacency.

"I am more than thankful for all your sakes."

Mrs. Alston took her little boy into the dining-room presently, for she found that he was being made a hero very rapidly. She gave him some supper, and then prepared him for bed.

"Freddy," she said, taking him on her lap, "did you not know that it was naughty to go into Rob's boat without asking permission?"

Freddy hung his head a little. "I did n't mean to

sail," he replied, slowly ; "and I did n't touch the rowers."

"The oars. And yet my little boy ought to have asked mamma or Brother Rob. It is very wrong to take or use anything belonging to another, unless you have permission. You might have been drowned."

"But I did n't want the boat to go. I was only making believe sail, — just this way" ; and Freddy rocked himself backwards and forwards upon his mother's knee ; "then the boat came loose."

"So you see it was very dangerous. Were you not frightened ?"

Freddy considered. It must be confessed that at first he had felt very much elated. As the wind blew him slowly across the lake, he cheered lustily and waved his handkerchief, being delighted with the unassisted progress ; but presently, when the shores began to look strange, he tried to get the boat back to her moorings. Alas, little hands, how helpless you were, although stimulated with a child's best courage and ignorance of any danger !

"I was afraid one time, and I lay down in the boat and cried," he admitted, slowly, for now that he

was safe it seemed rather babyish to have felt any anxiety.

“God took care of you, Freddy. You might have been drowned very easily indeed. If the boat had tipped over, or if the wind had been high, — indeed, it has been a very narrow escape, and we are all most grateful to see you here safe. When we missed you and found the boat gone, we were dreadfully worried; and suppose there had been no one to send, — you must have stayed out in the boat all night!”

“Would a bear or crocodile have caught me, mamma?”

Mrs. Alston was compelled to smile. “You were in more danger of drowning than anything else. You are too little and too venturesome to go alone on the water, remember that. I don’t even want you to climb out on the stones unless some one is there to give you leave. And now, Freddy, listen to me. I should punish you but for one thing, — dear Rob was so glad to have you back that he begged me not to. It is for his sake, as I think you have been very naughty, and fully deserved it. You must be very good to Rob for his kindness.

Freddy looked quite sober. He had not thought of any punishment before.

"Now will you remember, — you are not to get into the boat unless some one gives you permission, if you do, it will be a very serious matter for you. And you must thank God for taking care of you. He does n't always bring naughty boys safely home."

Rob and Kathie came in to kiss him again and say good night. Kathie's eyes were full of tears, and Rob had a tender feeling round his heart.

"I know I shall never be so careless again," Rob said to Kathie.

"It was a great fright, and we cannot be too glad that you found him. Mamma and I walked up and down the bank, but my heart ached most for her. It would be very hard to lose any of us."

Rob winked away a tear. He had not thought much of a mother's unwearied care and watchfulness before, indeed he had sometimes felt that she was unnecessarily fearful, but he did not wonder now.

Freddy was bright enough the next morning, and gave quite a coherent account of his tour. The children made him tell it over again at school, and, in spite of a little misgiving, he could not help considering it quite an exploit.

Kathie and Miss Jessie finished Rob's sailor suit, and they had a gay time over the presentation. The boy looked decidedly handsome in it, for he put it on to do honor to the occasion. Then he gave the two girls a nice row, as he could use both oars very well. Charlie was with them and taking a lesson, for he began to like the amusement very much.

"Rob," he said, "would n't it be nice to have a boat-club? Dick was talking about it. And he thought some of the boys might join together and buy another boat, so we could have some racing."

"Why, that 's a splendid idea!" and Rob rested his oar in the row-lock. "Dick is pretty good. How many would there be, I wonder? At any rate, I want you!"

"I 'm not sure but that I should take a share in the other boat. I asked father, and he did n't object."

"O, that 's too bad! All you nice fellows will go over to the enemy!"

Charlie laughed. "We should all be good friends, I hope. It would be more fun to have two boats."

"We could row against time with this, and there are four oars. How many boys would there be, I wonder?"

"Fred Lauriston and Bryan Hinckley, Dick, and myself, — with you, five that know how to row a little."

"If you get a good strong party, I'll ask Uncle Robert to join mine," Rob declared, laughingly.

That very night he discussed the project with his uncle.

"Why, I think it will be very pleasant through vacation," he said, "and capital exercise for you boys."

So there was quite an excitement in the school, and it bade fair at its fever height to interfere with Latin and Greek. Now and then an exercise came to hand with an additional sketch of a row-boat and the small crew pulling with all their might.

When Lu Simonds heard of the plan he was most anxious to be counted in. He was no favorite with Dick or Charlie, and Rob had rather outgrown his first boyish admiration of a companion who could have as much money as he liked and spend it foolishly. So the boys had to be pretty cautious. They appointed a meeting at Rob's, and determined to ask Mr Conover's advice.

"If four of you boys are willing to put in for a

share, I think it can be easily managed. Then you can give whatever invitations you like, or, if you choose to form a club, that might be the better way."

"I can have a share," said Charlie.

"And I," was Dick Grayson's announcement.

"I 'm pretty sure father will let me," Bryan Hinckley said.

Fred colored. He was a fine fellow, in the senior class, but he had hard work to get along. This was his last school year at Brookside. He would be seventeen in the fall, and then meant to try the world on his own account.

"Boys," he said, frankly, — though how great an effort it cost him none of them knew, — "I don't want you to consider me mean or stingy, but my grandfather gives me all the money I can earn, and I want to work my way through college. And though I could take part of what I 've saved up, I don't think it would be just right ; but I 'd like —"

"No, Fred," replied Mr. Conover, as the youth hesitated, "it would not be quite the thing. And if you have planned to go away, you will need all that you can get."

"If I could be sure of selling the share I would n't mind."

"Why not join Rob's club?" Mr. Conover asked.

"But the trouble about this share. We don't want Lu Simonds in, sir," Fred answered.

"Well, I will take the share at present, and if you desire any one to have it he may."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Dick.

"Four will do for a crew, Mr. Conover?"

"Better say five, for fear of accidents."

"But what am I to do?" asked Rob, rather dolefully. "Uncle Robert, would it be fair for you to join my side?"

"I'd have to count for two," returned Mr. Conover, laughing.

"Well, why not? Then I'll only have to hunt up two more."

"The boys must decide this."

"But you could row better than any two of us," said Dick Grayson.

"That is quite possible."

"He has been so kind that I think we ought," Bryan said.

"No, boys, that has nothing to do with it. We will

not decide the matter now. Rob may find enough for his crew. At all events, we will wait a while. I think that you had better not go too deeply into it until vacation."

"That 's a fact," replied Dick. "Mr. Crittenden said yesterday that some of us had boat on the brain."

"Just form your club in the mean while, and practise a little. Vacation will soon be here."

The meeting broke up with the utmost good feeling; but as Rob was walking up the lawn with his uncle he said, "It 's rather hard on me, I think, all the nice fellows going to the other boat."

"I have faith that it will come out fair for your side, though," his uncle replied, smilingly.

Kathie was very much interested, but of course espoused her brother's side warmly.

"It will be a very good thing for them to have another boat," she said, "then ours will be a little more at liberty."

She and Miss Jessie found it very convenient to row across the lake when they wanted to go to the woods, as it was quite a drive around. They went after wild-flowers, mosses, and pine cones; for Kathie

was much interested in the manufacture of certain stands and baskets that were to be disposed about the porch and lawn. The roses and vines put out the summer before were doing nicely, though at first Kathie counted their leaves. After a week or two this was not possible.

Her pansies were doing finely. It seemed at first as if nothing would ever come of the little round leaves; but presently two that were longer peeped out, and then a tiny cluster.

"They will be in bloom in five or six weeks," Mr. Morrison said.

"From the middle until the end of May."

"Yes. You may choose a bed, and we will get the soil rightly prepared. There is a good deal in that."

"But how do you know?"

"O, I keep reading; I have several books at home; and then, too, I try experiments."

Kathie began to think the experiments very entertaining. Uncle Robert brought home a book on floriculture, and she and Aunt Ruth studied it industriously. Indeed, Aunt Ruth was thankful to be well enough to share these pleasant labors. Every day she grew stronger, and she was only a very little

lame. She gained flesh quite rapidly, and looked young and pretty once more.

Every day Kathie found out something new. The brown buds on the Norway pines burst open one day, and disclosed the prettiest little clusters of pale green that were just ready to shoot out; then the larches began with their slender tassels, the firs and cedars in their various tints. The white and the Austrian pines thrust their needles through the brown covering and seemed to grow every minute; the maples and beeches blossomed, and the climbing roses began to bud.

"I don't believe there's a place in the whole world as beautiful as Cedarwood!" Kathie exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "And yet I was almost afraid at first, it looked so dismal and forlorn."

"A little care and a good deal of labor have quite transformed it. We could n't have found a better man than Mr. Morrison. That was a lucky thought of yours, Kathie."

The Morrisons' cottage vied with it in beauty, certainly. Hugh and his wife were both great lovers of nature. Mrs. Morrison had her own garden, that was kept neat and trim, and the vines were trained

around the doorway and beside the windows, so that the house might be sweet with rose and honeysuckle bloom.

Presently it came time to put out the house-plants. Kathie was busy as a bee, and called on Uncle Robert for assistance. At one side of the house there was a large space devoted especially to flowers, and a number of smaller beds here and there in the lawn.

"Suppose we fill these with some one particular thing; for instance, this one with heliotrope?" said Uncle Robert.

"But we have n't enough."

"I think we can make it do. Bring the pots over here."

"There are three in purple, and one that is white."

"Well, we will take that for the centre."

"Then I don't see how you are going to make three go around it."

"You fancy that you cannot make a circle out of three?"

"I don't know what you can do," she answered, with a doubtful smile.

"Three is a magical number. I shall fill this bed with the remaining plants. And, Kathie, a cross can be made with three pennies."

There was something so quizzical in his look that Kathie had a dim suspicion she was being taken in.

"I'll try it by and by," she said, slowly. "What are you going for?" — as he turned to leave her.

"Some charcoal."

She sat down on the grass and waited for him to return, wondering in her mind what he meant to do with charcoal. He came back with a great basin full of pulverized fragments, then he dug three small holes at even distances.

"That makes a triangle of it," Kathie said, watching him closely. Then he poured in some charcoal, took the plants out of the pots and placed them in, and put a little more coal over the top.

"What is that for?" she asked.

"To give them a beautiful deep color."

"How odd! Who told you?"

"O, I knew that long ago. We will doctor some of our red roses with it also. It will make their color much richer."

"O, what are you doing?" — for with his scissors he was snipping off branches here and there.

Her pretty face was full of pain, as if it had hurt

her, and her voice had a little strand of terror in it.

"My dear child, these are to be new heliotropes."

"But you 've spoiled the others."

"No, for where these were cut off they will push out half a dozen new shoots. Now we will set these in the ground."

He placed about a dozen at intervals, and then sprinkled charcoal plentifully over the surface.

"We will cover these slips with the pots, in this fashion"; and he inverted them. "They must be wet once every day, and the coverings taken off at night. In a month we shall have a magnificent bed of heliotrope."

Kathie looked at it rather regretfully.

"Where is your faith, little girl?"

She smiled then and replied, as she glanced up archly, "If I were Rob, I should say it looked rather skinny."

The roses were put out, and the geraniums. A good many of these last Uncle Robert divided also. Then the pansies were arranged.

"There 's quite a deal of gardening done, but I can't resolve about the cross and the three pennies.

I 've been trying to do it every way in my head, and can only make a triangle. You cannot cut off pieces as you did with the heliotrope."

"Try, when you go into the house."

"Where 's Gypsy?" and she glanced around.
"Come, Gypsy, little birdie."

There was no answer, and Kathie glanced around in alarm.

"Gypsy!"

"Peep!" called the daintiest little voice in the world.

"O, look, Uncle Robert! he 's there on the fir."

Sure enough he was perched on the slender cedar, which bent with his weight, and the soft wind swayed him to and fro. He looked so saucy and cunning that they both laughed.

Kathie went towards the porch calling him, and at the last moment he swept down like a flash and alighted on her shoulder.

"You have had enough frolic," she said, "and now you must go into your house."

Gypsy did not like this part so well, and winked out of his black eye in a most beguiling manner. But somehow he seemed to understand that he must

be content, and in a few moments was pouring forth a succession of the most brilliant trills.

Kathie took a bath and changed her dress, for gardening always left a touch of the soil. She went down stairs and found Uncle Robert in the library.

"I've been trying these pennies," she exclaimed, in a perplexed tone, "and you cannot place them in the form of a cross."

"Well, I said *make* a cross with them"; and the least little smile lurked under the fringe of mustache.

"I can't do it."

Uncle Robert took the three between his thumb and finger and marked the form of a cross on the library table.

"Oh!" exclaimed Kathie, and then she laughed.

"It's a rather boyish trick. I learned it when I was a youngster. But you know now how to fill a circle with three plants of heliotrope."

"I think I have learned a good deal this morning, and there's the dinner-bell. Like Freddy, I'm hungry"; and she gave Uncle Robert's hand a tender squeeze.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE LAKE.

THE pansy-bed flourished finely. In about seven weeks from the planting they began to blossom. There were many varieties, and they presented a very rich and elegant appearance in their deep velvety purple, soft violet, orange, yellow, and some almost white. Kathie was very particular about the slips of heliotrope, and out of the twelve they lost only two. The plants that had been trimmed grew thicker and were loaded with clustering blooms.

"That 's a success certainly," declared Kathie.

Freddy was very much interested in gardening also. He had a nice large plot in which he planted flower-seeds first, but as they did not make their appearance in the course of a few days, he raked his ground over and planted vegetables, which he proposed to sell to Hannah, who willingly promised to buy all that he could raise. These not succeeding to his expectations, corn was his next experiment.

By that time he was tired, and amused himself with the rabbits, guinea-pigs, and Polly, who was never weary of making a noise. She always seemed delighted with the sound of her voice, whether she were mocking cat, bird, or bobolink, or screaming as only a parrot can.

To the great delight of Kathie and Fred a brood of young chickens came out. Soft little downy things, that hardly knew how to manage their two legs, and showed a tendency to tumble over on their heads for the first few days, but who soon peeped and ran about in the cunningest fashion. They were eclipsed by the ducks, however. Mr. Morrison had bought a pair of beautiful white top-knots, and there were seven little ones tinged with the softest gray, who took to the water like fishes.

"We can almost imagine that they are swans," said Kathie, in a tone of delight.

The boat-clubs did not languish, although they had some difficulty in getting them just right. When Mr. Langdon heard of the affair he came over to see Rob, and offered his services. The boys thought that might balance Mr. Conover, for they were all very anxious to take him in. He was desirous of having

a share in the boat, for Mr. Adams's house, like the Alstons', was near the lake, so he proposed that the head-quarters of one club should be there. The company was formed, and after many discussions Dick Grayson carried the day, and they adopted the name of Nereids. Dick, Charlie, Bryan Hinckley, and Mr. Langdon were members of that, while Lauriston came over to Rob's side. Tom Weir and Walter Dorrance were accepted, and then the Iona was complete, although at any time, if they chose to have two boys in the place of the gentlemen, the seniors would consider themselves honorary members.

The boating interfered a good deal with the geological excursions. Rob, in true boy-fashion, had room for only one great idea at a time. Mr. Langdon and Mr. Conover put their heads together, and decided, as presidents of the respective clubs, that there should be no regular racing until after vacation; but the boys did some on their own account every Saturday.

The time of closing drew near. Lauriston, Hinckley, and two others, were in their last year, and were termed by courtesy the graduating class, though there were half a dozen more boys in the first form.

The closing exercises were always interesting at the Academy, but this year they excited more than ordinary attention. Parents and friends of the pupils were invited to come, and the boys began to count on quite a gala-day.

"If we could fix up a little," Charlie Darrell said, glancing around at the bare, dingy walls.

"Fix up! How?" asked one of the boys.

"Why, make things look pretty."

"Charlie's just like a girl about such matters," said Lauriston; "but I don't see exactly what we could do."

"Why, we might get some greens, and have a flag or two, and some flowers."

"Just it!" exclaimed Dick Grayson; "I don't know as I can do much of the work, for my Latin oration drives me pretty hard with all the other matters, but I can get a host of flowers. Say, boys, let's talk to Mr. Deane about it."

So a knot of them waylaid Mr. Deane that afternoon. Beautifying had never occurred to him before.

"Why, yes," he said. "I believe we are to have quite an audience, and we might brighten up a bit; but the worst of such an undertaking is that a good

many want to talk and plan, and there 's only a few to do the work."

"I 'll work," said Charlie, manfully.

"And I too," added Rob and Dick.

"You had better let Charlie plan," Lauriston declared.

"Let 's have a committee-meeting. Order, order!"

"Here 's a chairman!" and two or three thrust Charlie into Mr. Crittenden's leathern-covered arm-chair. "Now for a speech!"

With that, silence fell upon all the boys for an instant, and then a hearty laugh ensued.

"Well, Charlie, tell us what is to be done," Hinckley said. "I guess your head 's level on the matter."

Charlie Darrell colored, but he was very much in earnest, and plunged into the subject at once. "We could go to the woods and get ground-pine for festoons, and cedar and hemlock branches and laurel leaves —"

"When shall we go?"

"Thursday is closing-day. Wednesday afternoon we ought to do the most of our work. To-morrow we ought to go to the woods."

"That 's the talk!"

"We 'll ask Mr. Crittenden to-morrow."

With a little fun and frolic the boys dispersed. The next day there was a grand consultation, though at first Mr. Crittenden was afraid it would take the boys' attention too much.

"Some of the younger ones are going to do most of the work," explained Lauriston.

No further demur was made. The boys went to the woods and came home laden with spoils. They packed their greens in the wood-shed, sketched some sort of plan of their work, and concluded they had done enough for one day.

Wednesday was a rather broken day. Exercises were gone over and corrected for the last time, some of the lesser examinations were concluded, and there was a reign of constrained but general confusion. At one they were dismissed.

Then the boys went to work in good earnest. The large room was swept and dusted, and the seats arranged, leaving quite a space for visitors. While some of the boys twisted the long sprays of pine together, Charlie perched himself on the ladder and drove the nails. Rob and Lauriston followed, hanging the festoons.

“Why, even that transforms the place!” declared Hinckley. “What next, Charlie?”

Charlie took a survey with a critical eye. “We want to fasten a cluster of laurel-leaves in here and there, and there must be some sort of pretty bunches made for these brackets. Then if we could have a small bouquet of flowers put in each one, — And what about the flags? They ought to be arranged over the platform.”

“We have one,” said Dick.

Walter Dorrance promised another.

They fastened sprays of evergreen around the brackets that now and then held candles at a business meeting. Then they trimmed Mr. Crittenden’s desk, and Mr. Deane’s, which stood in a little recess.

“Boys, do you know that it is after six?”

“O, what *has* become of the afternoon?”

“Look there! Now, that’s nobby, I say. Why, it looks like a chapel!”

Every face glowed with conscious satisfaction.

“Three cheers for Charlie Darrell!” exclaimed Lauriston; and the school-room rang to the hearty hurrah, as the boys swung round their hats.

“Now the flags and the flowers. Two or three of

us must come bright and early to-morrow morning. Exercises commence at ten."

There was a profusion of flowers, the boys found. Jessie Darrell had sent two large vases, and Kathie several smaller ones. The dingy, commonplace building was absolutely transformed, and not a boy but that felt repaid for his labor. Some of those who had laughed at the idea at first admitted in their secret hearts that it was a decided success. There is something in beauty and harmony that appeals to the rudest heart; and as the classes marched in from the recitation-room just at ten, they held their heads erect with conscious pride, and felt really nobler and better than in their every-day, commonplace surroundings. Charlie Darrell had but followed out his natural love in proposing the adornment, and yet he had roused more real feeling upon the subject than the most eloquent lecture could have done.

Quite a number of ladies and gentlemen were assembled, and they continued to enter by twos and threes until some more benches had to be brought. Mr. Crittenden felt really proud of the audience, for it was the largest that had ever been to an Academy examination.

The exercises commenced. There was a brief prayer by one of the Brookside clergymen, and a short address. The examination of several classes followed this, and the boys were ready and correct with their answers. Each one of the graduating class delivered an oration, but Lauriston's was admitted to be the finest. There were some exercises by the younger boys, the distribution of prizes, the roll of honor was read, then the names of the distinguished pupils, and, last, those who were meritorious. Charlie Darrell's was among the former, and Rob's headed the latter list. The whole closed with an address, which contained many sensible remarks and no little good counsel for the boys, both those who were going away and those who remained.

Afterward there was a great deal of congratulation and hand-shaking. Mr. Crittenden felt really proud of his boys. He told Mr. Deane that he had never enjoyed an examination so much, and he parted from many of them with absolute regret.

Once fairly out of doors, there was no end to the shouts and hurrahs. The boys appeared to be fairly wild; even the presence of their mothers and sisters scarcely restrained them.

"How beautifully you did make the room look!" Miss Jessie said, with her brightest smile.

"Charlie ought to have the credit of that idea."

"But you all worked," was Charlie's modest disclaimer.

"And you furnished the brains."

"Now for a jolly time," said Dick. "Latin and Greek may go to the winds."

"And we'll go to the boats."

They all laughed. It takes only a little to make merriment for happy boys. Before they parted a short consultation was held. The two clubs would meet to-morrow morning on the lake, and have a good practice, to say the least.

"I'm so sorry that you were not amongst the distinguished pupils," said Kathie to Rob after they reached home.

"Well, I suppose that I was n't distinguished for anything," answered Rob. "I stand very fair, so you will have to be content with that."

"But I don't like to have Charlie Darrell ahead of you. He is n't quite so old, either."

"It comes natural for him to be good, and all that," declared Rob. "I believe he's cut out for a

parson, and if he is asked a question he always has everything at his tongue's end. It would kill me to remember so much."

"O no, Rob," said his uncle, good-naturedly.

"Well, I can't do it, but when you come to ball or cricket, or even rowing, there is n't a fellow in the Academy that can beat me, and they know it!"

"Life cannot be all cricket and boating," his uncle replied, gravely.

"I 'm just telling you what comes natural to me. Now I 'll bet that I 've studied a good deal harder than Charlie, and I 've had twenty temptations to talk and to do wrong things where he has had one. It is n't hard work for him to be good, but I 'm not a particle like him. I don't mean that he is n't nice, or that I don't admire him, but I 'm sure there are worse boys in the world, and even at the Academy, than I have been. What are you smiling at, Uncle Robert?"

"Your defence. I don't expect you to be like Charlie Darrell. On the whole I think your school year has been very fair, and you have made some improvement. I should sooner recommend Hinckley or Lauriston for an example."

"Uncle Robert, I think Lauriston is a real fine fellow. I 've liked him ever since the talk about buying the boat. It was so brave in him to say just what he did, and rather hard too."

"What do you suppose you would have done, Rob?"

"Well, if I had loved to row as well, I fancy that I *should* have put in for a share. I would n't want the boys to think me mean."

"Did any of you consider him mean?"

"No, we did n't. It was real noble."

"Why should you feel afraid then?"

Rob colored. "I don't believe that I can explain. When you undertake to do these things yourself you don't seem to have as much faith in other people's judging you rightly."

"Ah, Rob, you must *do* what is right, and leave the blame or praise out of the question. Think of something higher than mere human opinion."

"I'm almost sorry to leave the Academy, after all. I begin to like such fellows as Lauriston and Hinckley and Weir. But they 're not coming next term. Do you really think that I shall go away?"

"I have a fancy that it will be best."

"O, well, I 'll like it anyhow' ; and Rob fell to whistling in true boyish fashion.

Because it was vacation, I suppose, he went up to his store-room and tumbled everything about, took part of his tools out to the barn under the impression that he was in sore need of some article or other, and then Jasper seemed to invite him to ride. Down went hammer and hatchet, and saddling Jasper he was off full tilt.

"O," said Kathie, "I guess Rob forgot that we wanted to go to Staunton. But you and I can go in the little wagon, Aunt Ruth, and we 'll tuck Freddy in somewhere, or he will feel so disappointed."

Rob was so delighted with his sense of freedom that he could think of no one else. He had a good canter, and came home in higher spirits than ever.

The boys began their vacation by taking an early start the next morning. By nine they had assembled and the boats were out. Rob and Tom Weir were oarsmen of the Jessie, while Dick and Bryan Hinckley managed the Titan. Tom was a strong, healthy fellow, with an abundance of muscle, and for young beginners they did very well. Uncle Robert watched them from the bank, corrected false strokes, and gave

both parties useful hints. They went the length of the lake several times ; now the Nereids were ahead, then the Ionas. They were all a good deal excited, and cheered in an uproarious fashion. The quiet lake was little used to such boisterous merriment, and sent back startled echoes from the dim, woody shores. At last the rowers began to show signs of giving out. Uncle Robert made the signal, and they turned slowly shoreward, breathless, and heated with their exertion.

"Pretty evenly matched," declared Uncle Robert.

"Now you and Mr. Langdon ought to try. We want to see who has the best man."

"We are at your service any time," he replied, gayly. "Ours, you will remember, are not regulation crews. We all mean to do the best we can in a healthful, honest way, and there must be no jealousies or heart-burnings."

Both parties assented to this, but in their secret hearts each hoped that the winning side would be his.

"I think we ought to have a match pretty soon," exclaimed Dick. "We will have the shore lined with a large and enthusiastic concourse of spectators,

and crowds of lovely ladies will wave their handkerchiefs; is n't that the way of newspaper descriptions?"

The boys laughed heartily.

"We might try on Saturday afternoon; could n't we, Uncle Robert?"

"Yes; you will be in pretty good practice by that time."

Mr. Langdon and Uncle Robert took a turn alone that evening, with the boys for spectators. They were pretty evenly matched. Mr. Conover had the most endurance, but Mr. Langdon had been skilfully trained. The boys were very well satisfied with their champions, and they decided to have a rowing-match on Saturday afternoon.

Numerous invitations were given out. The lake was about a mile long, and at the upper end, the shore being rather rugged and elevated, a fine view of the whole could be obtained. This was to be the starting-point. Both crews were to row down to the curve, where Silver River commenced its course, and back again. Going down the boys were to try their skill alone, and coming back the champions were to lead off.

Saturday afternoon being a leisure time with many people in Brookside, there was a crowd, sure enough. The boys turned out strong. Both schools were well represented, but the Academy boys set up the highest claim. Even Mr. Deane was there, as he had consented to act as one of the judges. The other was Mr. Adams.

Of the Nereids, Dick and Bryan held the oars, while Charlie was at the helm. Rob's boating-suit had been copied quite extensively, and the boys looked very attractive in their blue and white, their broad collars open at the throat and tied with a black ribbon. The faces were so bright and eager that it was quite a study to watch them.

They took their seats and the signal was given. Rob began with his longest strokes, and in a short time was a boat's length ahead. The boys on the shore cheered the Ionas heartily, and Rob and Tom both felt the added inspiration. Dick Grayson pulled steadily, looking straight before him, but Bryan was a trifle flurried and disheartened.

"They 'll tire themselves out," said Dick; "I am counting on that."

"Rob 's the best oarsman of the lot," was Bryan's answer, and on they went.

When they were half-way down, the Nereids began to gain.

"Hurry up!" exclaimed Charlie, from his post.
"We may beat yet."

"A little too soon," was Dick's brief response.

They could see Mr. Langdon and Mr. Conover on the little point of ground, and Rob redoubled his efforts, but he began to feel rather tired, and could not make every stroke tell. Then the Nereids came in gallantly. Dick had been waiting for this moment. On and on, nearer, nearer, the boats were head and head, then the Jessie swerved a little from an unlucky stroke, and the Titan's bow touched the shore.

"Well done!" exclaimed Uncle Robert.

Rob's face flushed with anger and disappointment, the first natural tumult of feeling. Then, with a strong effort, he commanded himself.

"It's too bad!" said Tom, in his jolly fashion, "but we must own up beat. We did our best, however."

"If it had n't been for that last stroke or two," declared Rob, regretfully, loath to own the defeat.

Mr. Langdon took out his watch.

"For young beginners you have made excellent time," he said. "And our side gained by only a very little," — noticing Rob's disappointed expression.

"No, Mr. Langdon, you shall not spoil our victory, for it was *that*; and if we had been beaten, of course we would have borne it with a good grace," Bryan replied, with boyish complacency.

The two men laughed. Rob began to recover from his chagrin and smiled also. Charlie Darrell was very enthusiastic; indeed, the Nereids enjoyed their side of the race immensely.

The boys rested up a few moments. They were anxious to get back to the crowd, but Mr. Conover would not consent to start immediately. At length they took their seats, turned about, and stood fair.

At a given signal they started. The strokes were musically regular, the oars flashed and feathered in the soft green and golden light made by the shadows thrown across the lake by the overhanging trees. For more than half the distance they kept together, much to Rob's discomfiture, then the Jessie shot ahead.

The boys, of course, were rather tired, so Mr. Langdon and Mr. Conover did the hardest part of the

work. They both entered largely into the spirit of it, especially when they came near enough to hear the shouts and cheers. The Titan gained again, but it was only momentary. Then a flaw of wind came down the lake, but Mr. Conover, more used to disadvantages than his opponent, made the best of this, and the Jessie skimmed gallantly along into port.

“Three cheers for the Jessie!”

Rob sprang up in the boat and waved his hat in triumph to the laggards.

“You ’ve beat!” acknowledged Mr. Langdon, “though I believe I have done nothing like this since college days. It was a tight race.”

There was a lively time on shore. The results were very fair to each, though Dick insisted that Mr. Conover alone was the winner. Rob was not particular so that he came in on the winning side, but the boys, one and all, took it in good part. As for the spectators, they were about equally divided, and very warm partisans. Miss Jessie was called this way and that, her interest in her brother divided by her jaunty little namesake that lay rocking in the tide.

“Well, we beat once, Miss Darrell,” said Dick, rather triumphantly, “and I suppose that ought to satisfy us.”

Presently the crowd began to disperse, though the boats took in a number of passengers, as several guests had been invited to tea at the Alstons', and many of the children were crazy for a sail.

"It was royal," Rob said that evening, sitting on the porch fragrant with honeysuckle. "And I was so glad that we beat once at least."

"I saw the disappointment the first time. Tom and Walter took it better."

"But I had set my heart upon it, and the boat belonged to me."

"I don't want to lecture you in such a happy moment as this, my boy, but I would like you to remember this grand old text, 'He that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city.' It seems to me that a generous acknowledgment of defeat is a nobler and sweeter thing than a victory."

Robert Alston was silent, and leaned his chin on his hand. He had been almost angry, that was the truth, but his heart was so deeply engrossed in the matter that he was quite sure he could not have helped it. And then he recalled the frank, cheerful smile that he had seen on Lauriston's face, and felt that he was n't so much of a hero after all, even if he did own a boat.

CHAPTER IX.

ROB'S CHIVALRY.

KATHIE ran up to Aunt Ruth's room one morning in high spirits, with two letters in her hand.

"One for you, mamma, but I can guess what is in it. Mine is from Mr. Meredith, and I am quite sure that it contains the same announcement."

Mrs. Alston laid down her sewing and took up the letter with a smile.

"Why, it seems that there is quite a party coming, — Dr. and Mrs. Markham, and Mrs. Havens —"

"And, best of all, Mr. Meredith! Here's a message that I must give Rob. Mr. Meredith was very sorry that they did not invite him to the boat-race, and hopes that they will get one up for his especial benefit."

"He will like that," said Aunt Ruth.

"I must answer this note immediately," exclaimed Mrs. Alston. "They wish to come next week, and we shall be glad to have them."

"I 'll answer mine, and take them down to the office," Kathie replied ; but first she went to look for Rob.

"Did you tell him just what time we boys made?" he asked, "though we have beaten it since by seven minutes. Hooray! What fun it will be! Tell him to hurry down on the lightning express."

Before she had ended, Rob came rushing in with another message. When the letters were done she started out again and mounted Hero, that she had left fastened to the hitching-post. She had become quite a famous little horsewoman.

An hour before she had brought with her letters one for Grandmother Morrison that had come with the English mail. She saw that there was quite a commotion in the little cottage, and halted, wondering if she had been the bearer of bad news.

The old lady wiped her eyes with her checked apron. "O Miss Kathie!" she said, and then she stopped.

Kathie saw that there was some trouble, and at the first moment did not know what to answer ; but presently said, in her soft voice, which was comfort itself, "I am sorry to see you so grieved. Can I help you in any way?"

"O no, Miss Kathie, thanking you a thousand times. It's bad news, sure enough, and something in it that would be pleasant if it came in any other way. The letter is from my son William. He's been very unfortunate."

Kathie looked the question she was too delicate to ask.

"You know that I told you about his grandfather's taking him when we came to America, — for we had such a host of little ones then, and now there's only Hugh and my daughter at the West. Well, William's had very hard times, losses and poor crops, and now his wife has died. He has sold the farm and is coming to America."

"It will be nice to see him."

"Yes, though he was only twelve when we came away, and now he's eight-and-thirty. He married a neighbor's daughter; I stood for the little one at her christening, and her mother was my bridesmaid, so I've always had a motherly feeling towards her. And now the poor thing is dead, though she was ailing a long while. There's a little girl left."

"Is there?" and Kathie was deeply interested.
"How old is she?"

"Somewhere about ten. I want to see the poor child for its mother's sake, though it's a sad, sad journey. But nearly all our relatives there are dead, and William feels as if he could n't stay."

"When will they come?"

"Why, it's about three weeks since this letter was written, and he said he should start soon, so we need not answer it. They'll be here in a week or two. O Miss Kathie, I am thankful that we are so comfortable and can take them in."

Kathie was glad too, and after a few words of comfort went her way rather more thoughtfully, with a picture of the little motherless girl in her mind. After her return home she related the incident to her mother and Aunt Ruth, and Mrs. Alston presently went down to the cottage to comfort old Mrs. Morrison.

Vacation was passing off splendidly, though Rob wished that he could make every day a week long. The boat-clubs soon filled up, and the rowers improved so rapidly that Mr. Langdon and Mr. Conover did become honorary members, though they held the position of presidents, and any disputed point was referred to them. They had thought crossing the

lake in twelve minutes quite a brilliant success at first, but the Ionas had made eight minutes' time on one occasion, of which they were justly proud.

There had been considerable jealousy and disappointment among the rejected applicants, for there was quite a number refused. Luther Simonds and some of his party felt disposed to resent it, and were inclined to make a row whenever they could. Luther would fain have owned a boat, but they lived a long distance from either lake or river, and Mr. Simonds, indulgent on many points, refused his son in this very decidedly. The boy's next step was to become a member of either club, but here he was refused again, though he was really too indolent to be of the slightest service in such a capacity.

He had felt rather vexed with Rob for his early defections, and he took a peculiar delight in teasing him. Rob's quick temper would flare up on the slightest provocation, while Luther possessed one of those lazy and ingeniously exasperating natures, that, under a mask of coolness, can say and do anything covertly stinging.

Mr. Langdon had long before purchased Mr. Conover's share of the Titan, but in some fashion of

school-boy gossip the first arrangement came to Luther's ears.

"Why did n't you let me know there was a share going a-begging?" he asked of Rob one day. "I could have bought that out of my own pocket-money, no thanks to father. It was a real mean trick, Alston, when you knew how much I wanted it. Why did n't you tell me?"

"I guess the Nereids would n't consider such a land-lubber much of an addition to their crew," returned Rob, enjoying the hit he was making.

Luther's dark, heavy face flushed.

"What are you?" he retorted, rather angrily.

"Robert Alston, *not* at your service"; and the boy made a mocking bow.

"You put on altogether too many airs, Alston," was the rejoinder, "for a fellow who can never spend a cent without asking his mother and uncles and old-maid aunts."

"Say that again if you dare!" and Rob's face was in a blaze.

"O, who 's afraid! Yes, I dare say it. Poor little sonny, who can't be trusted out of sight with a penny! Does your mother count your money every night?"

and you know there's but precious little of it yours. Were n't you poor enough before your uncle came back? Your mother had to sew for the neighbors, and now you act as if you owned all Silver Lake; but you don't."

Rob's blood had come up to fire heat. Was his mother any the less a lady because she had once been poor?

"Hold your tongue, — will you?" he exclaimed, savagely.

"O, I have n't been tutored into obedience by an old-maid aunt —"

It was this sneer that had roused Rob a moment before. Like a flash his hand crossed Simonds's face with all the force the resentful nerves and muscles could bring to bear upon it.

Luther Simonds uttered a cry of rage and pain, and the next instant had grappled Rob. He was larger and older, but every pulse in Rob's body was wrought up to a fierce state of excitement that gave him strength. Dick and Charlie Darrell ran to the rescue.

Rob twisted himself out of his adversary's hands and dealt blows right and left.

"What is it all about?" asked Dick. "Are you crazy?"

Luther was out of breath, and paused. He was not quite sure that he should come off conqueror, and so wisely hesitated, eying Rob with sullen passion.

"That 's enough," exclaimed Dick, linking his hand within Rob's arm. "You are a big bully, Simonds, and ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"He struck the first blow!"

"And I 'll do it again," announced Rob, with a tigerish gleam out of the eyes. "I won't take insults from you or any other fellow. Say what you dare about me, but learn to let others alone, or I 'll make you."

With that Rob turned away, impelled by the pressure upon his arm. He had received a hard blow just under the eye, and his cheek was swelling rapidly.

"What was the row?" asked Charlie Darrell. "How peppery you are, Rob!"

"He insulted me. I 'll teach him to let my mother alone, anyhow."

Rob went down to the shore-edge, and, dipping

his handkerchief in the water, began to bathe his forehead, for his head was aching. He would say nothing further about the cause of the quarrel, and presently started for home.

Aunt Ruth was sitting on the porch, reading, but she started at Kathie's exclamation. "O, have you fallen, or what has happened?" she asked, in alarm.

"Nothing much."

"But your face is dreadfully swollen, and your eye nearly closed! Come up stairs and let me bathe it."

Rob thought, looking out of his one eye, that Aunt Ruth was very pretty in her white dress, with a knot of blue ribbon at her throat, and a spray of drooping fuschias in her hair. She certainly was *not* antiquated, and he felt angrier than ever at Lu Simonds.

"Was it an accident?" Aunt Ruth questioned, in the softest of voices.

"No," said Rob, honestly; "one of the boys gave me some impudence, and we had a — a —"

"Scrimmage," appended Kathie, viewing the side of the face that looked like a caricature.

"That was just it"; and he smiled out of one corner of his mouth.

"I'm sorry," Aunt Ruth returned, gravely.

"You would n't blame me if you knew the whole story. I can't tell it to you now, for my head is aching fearfully."

She put a cold-water bandage on his face and tied it tightly; then she bathed his head, and made him lie on the lounge. Her fingers were so soft, her movements so graceful and quiet, her brow calm and smooth, and in her cheeks a most delicate pink. He could count up half a dozen old maids in the village who were wrinkled, sallow, sharp-nosed, and had lost their teeth; but Aunt Ruth would never look like these, he felt sure. Yet he hated to have any one call her that!

He remembered, when he was sick, that she had been most kind and patient. And in all that old life, when she was lame and poor, and had to sew through the weary days, no one had ever heard a complaint. She could knit mittens and mend ball-covers, help him through hard sums and the analytical sentences in grammar that used to puzzle him so, and when he and Fred, noisy wretches that they were, used to

make racket enough to raise the roof of the house, she never said a word about headache, though he knew from the pale face and tired eyes that it must have ached often. She was sweet and good and lovable, and pretty too, so all the boy's innate chivalry was aroused.

By and by the thumping in his temple was rather less suggestive of a sledge-hammer, and the burning cheek began to grow cooler. He turned a little on the pillow.

"What would you like to have, Rob?" she asked, softly.

"Nothing. Aunt Ruth —"

"Well?"

"Don't you mean ever to get married?"

It was out now, though Rob's face burned with a sense of shame, as if he had no right to ask such a question.

Kathie glanced up with a smile, but Aunt Ruth turned scarlet to the edge of her hair.

"I'm sorry," he went on, penitently, with a touch of boyish delicacy.

"That's nothing," she returned, gayly. "But why, — are you becoming tired of me?"

"O no; don't imagine that," he said, earnestly.

"How queer!" exclaimed Kathie. "Why, I never thought of Aunt Ruth's being married!"

"No, Rob, I fancy that I never shall be. Do you suppose that you shall get ashamed of an old-maid aunt?" She gave him the sweetest smile in the world.

"But why should anybody call you that? You won't be cross and prying and queer-looking like Miss Niles."

"No, I shall never be squint-eyed, nor have a long nose and chin, but I shall grow old and wrinkled, and maybe a little sharp in the temper, or suspiciously neat"; and she turned her bright, tender face toward him. "Every year that takes you forward to manhood will bring me nearer the verge of an old woman. Even if I were married that would still be the case."

"But it seems so different then."

"If I keep myself young in heart, fresh in faith and hope, gracious in temper, and still feel an interest in those around me, shall I make a less pleasant companion, Rob?"

"No," he replied, slowly.

"What has put all this into your head just now?"

"I heard somebody sneered at," he said, evasively.

Aunt Ruth colored a little. "It is one of the penalties that we must pay," she returned. "Well-bred people never make invidious distinctions. There is generally some good reason why a woman does not marry."

"But you are not old, and I am sure you are pretty —"

"Shall you love me less, my dear Rob?"

"No, indeed"; and yet a wistful and not quite satisfied look crossed his face.

"Rob," Aunt Ruth began, laying her soft hand on his forehead, "I believe I shall tell you a story. Before we lost our fortune I became acquainted with a gentleman that I admired very much, and after a while we were engaged. The house in which your mother's money and my own was invested failed, and then your father died. Our marriage was postponed for some time and in the mean while I met with my accident. My lover was at the South then, and knowing that I must be an invalid, and perhaps a cripple all my life, I wrote to him releasing him from all promises. The long letter of explanations I

sent by a mutual friend, and though he seemed to regret it deeply, he assented to my views. Some time after he married my friend."

"O," exclaimed Kathie, "that was too bad! Didn't you feel sorry, Aunt Ruth?"

"My dear, I thought it quite right. She was a very sweet and amiable woman, and since there was no prospect of my ever making him happy, why should I condemn him to a homeless and rather solitary life?"

"But you are well now, and it seems hard," said Rob, much dissatisfied with the ending.

"There was a greater prospect of my dying at that time, however; and, to do him justice, I think he would have waited years. Considering my case hopeless, I was too proud to ask it of any man. You, being children, can hardly understand the peculiar feeling."

Kathie came and kissed her tenderly. "I'm sorry," she said; "and yet we are all glad to have you, and I do believe that we are very happy."

"I'm glad that you *could* have been married," Rob exclaimed, with grim satisfaction.

"My dear boy, there are very few people but that

might have been married in some fashion, had they chosen. And I hope that if you are ever tempted to sneer at single women, you will remember the good and useful lives many of them lead. Even Miss Niles, queer as she may be in some things, is most kind and generous in sickness, and more than once she has cared for the homeless and needy."

"You always see good in everybody."

"Because I think nearly every one has some redeeming traits. And then we can never understand all the trials and difficulties to which some people may have been subjected."

"That is very true," Kathie replied, thoughtfully.

Rob fell into a revery, and finally went to sleep, being waked at last by the return of his mother and his uncle.

"What's the matter here?" she asked, a little amazed.

Rob rubbed his eyes and glanced around, then put his hand up to his bruised cheek.

"I have been in a row," the boy answered, trying to laugh; "but I guess I'm not much hurt. I'll have to tell you about it, Uncle Robert, but I don't believe the rest could understand it."

"Very well."

Mrs. Alston undid the bandage. The swelling had gone down considerably, and he could open his eye, but there was likely to be an ugly mark.

"That will get well after a while," he said, gayly.

"Boys are always in some trouble," Mrs. Alston answered, rather sadly. "It was a bad blow."

"I gave one as hard in return, and that's my consolation," was the energetic answer.

After supper Rob and his uncle walked up and down the lawn, and he told the story very fairly.

"But I *was* furious," he said. "I felt for a minute as if I could have half killed him!"

"And that was a rather wild indulgence of temper. I cannot say that I admire fighting of any kind, and yet I shall not sermonize you. If the satisfaction pays for the suffering, that is the only thing necessary at present."

"It was awful mean in Simonds, but it's just like him. And then to talk about mamma!"

"It was very trying, and I hope he has been taught a lesson, if his brain is sufficiently receptive. And though it is a touch of the old clannish spirit, I always like to see a boy or a man stand up for his own family."

Rob found that he was not blamed very deeply, and by the next morning he had only a black eye as a reminder. But the affair had taught him more than one lesson, and strengthened his chivalrous respect for a class of women that boys are apt to hold in light esteem.

CHAPTER X.

PLEASURES AND PAINS.

KATHIE counted the intervening days with an anxious heart, and prayed fervently for fair weather. The flower-beds were overlooked, the house put in order, and then they waited for the visitors. The day was clear, and everything went well. Uncle Robert drove down to the station in the large carriage, and brought it back full.

Kathie was on the steps, ready for the first fond clasp. Mrs. Alston and Aunt Ruth smiled a welcome before a word was spoken.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the doctor, surveying Aunt Ruth from head to feet. "Why, you are plump and rosy, and look ten years younger! How about the dancing, hey? You have a nice green."

"O, she can play croquet," announced Kathie, "and take rambles in the woods. We have lovely times."

Mrs. Markham and Mrs. Havens were scarcely

done kissing her when Mr. Meredith took absolute possession and asked her a dozen questions in one breath. Then the procession was marshalled into the library, and from thence to their own rooms to refresh themselves after their warm and fatiguing journey.

The doctor was the first one down. His stay was brief, he said, so Kathie must begin with the wonders at once. Could n't they take a sniff of the lake breeze?

"Why, it's just here"; and Kathie led the way.

"I heard that you had regattas, and all that! Bands of music and crowds of spectators, I suppose?" and he glanced quizzically at her.

"Not much music except Mr. Morrison's flute, but we have delightful times rowing and going for lilies."

"I dare say you will want to come back and spend next winter with me. You can't see anybody here."

"I have n't been very lonesome," she replied, archly.

"I suppose you row and fish, and are learning to shoot a little, like strong-minded young women?"

"I can row a little, but I don't like to fish,—it seems cruel to me, and —"

"You are afraid of a gun," said the doctor, laughing.

"That is just it"; and Kathie's cheeks were rosier than ever. "But then I can ride."

"Yes, I believe I heard about the pony. He's a fine little fellow. So they have n't made a fine young lady of you yet?" and he studied her with his sharp gray eyes. "You'll have a long and pleasant childhood, little one."

Then he took a view of the grand old trees opposite, and the placid, silvery waters, drawing long, invigorating breaths, for the scene was so lovely, the air so fragrant with the coolness of the lake and the spicy odor of the trees.

Rob, who had been seized with a fit of boyish bashfulness and strayed off, suddenly came to light under a clump of acacia-trees. Kathie introduced him very gracefully, and in a few moments he was chatting with ease and freedom. He had improved a good deal in the past year. Contact with one of his own sex who was a perfect gentleman, albeit much his senior, had taken off the rough edges. He used to imagine that many of these polite and refined ways looked so like a girl; and, for himself, he had a

horror of anything girlish. But Mr. Meredith was the only one of the party that he thought he should feel at all interested in, and he had a fancy that his first moments would be devoted to Kathie.

Dr. Markham was shrewd, pleasant, and so used to everybody that he knew how to attract at once. Rob's frank, manly face and air pleased him wonderfully, for he was the very embodiment of a big, healthy, happy boy; and the doctor's great hobby was the wholesome and natural development of children, if one desired good, sound, sensible men and women. Kathie just suited him.

They took a ramble to the barn and stables, and Rob's turn-pole and a few other gymnastic arrangements were inspected.

"What kind of treatment do you call this?" said a gay, mellow voice. "Dr. Markham, there'll be coffee and pistols for two. I cannot stand being superseded in this fashion. Kathie, here I have been wandering around like a lost spirit —"

"Thy father's spirit, doomed to wander —" exclaimed Rob, with a merry twinkle of the eye, as he shook hands cordially.

"Exactly. I took a run down to the boat-house,

and not finding you perched on the rocky promontory, concluded that, like another bold mariner, you had been 'promiscuously drowned.' Instead of which, Dr. Markham has beguiled you. He's a dangerous man, and I give due notice that I am not to be quietly crowded out of my place."

Rob and Kathie laughed.

"Come, come," returned Dr. Markham, "that's pretty cool; just as if Kathie here had not been adopted into the bosom of my family. We must look into your claims, young sir!"

"You see it's coming to pistols," said Mr. Meredith, with a nod that was at once confidential and comic, and he assumed an air of resignation that was truly ludicrous.

"Coffee first," growled the doctor, "and that will not be until to-morrow morning."

Just then Uncle Robert joined them, and Kathie, feeling that she might be needed in the house, left the merry group. Mrs. Havens had changed her travelling-dress for one of cool lawn, and was sitting on the porch with Aunt Ruth.

"This is the loveliest little nest in the world," she said. "I don't wonder that you were anxious to get

back to it, though I suppose that it is not quite as charming in winter."

"But there was splendid skating on the lake, and sleigh-riding —"

"And what was best of all to you, — mamma," Mrs. Havens exclaimed with a smile, filling Kathie's pause.

There was a bright, tender flush on the little girl's cheek.

Then they talked of the flowers, and took a walk around the lawn. Mrs. Havens was delighted with the improvement in Aunt Ruth; indeed, she was hardly noticeably lame, and looked like quite another person from the pale invalid who had spent a week or so in New York about a year ago.

Dr. Markham joined them presently, and the bell rang for supper.

"You'll have to send Freddy up in the tower with it," said Kathie to Hannah, "for part of them are down at the lake."

So Freddy made a tremendous signal, much to his delight, but Mr. Meredith puzzled him a little by asking him who was keeper of the lighthouse, and if that was the fog-bell, also if he knew all the dangerous reefs along the coast?

"He ought to know a dangerous rock, for he fell off of it last summer," laughed Rob; "and he has been a long distance below the lake, all alone."

There was a deal of interest evinced in the adventure, and Freddy took it very complacently.

"I wonder that you were not drowned," said Mrs. Havens.

"O, I stayed in the boat," was the reply, with grave composure.

They had a great frolic out on the lawn after supper. Kathie tried to induct Dr. Markham into the mysteries of playing croquet, but he made tremendous work with the balls, and finally declared that the business was not at all in his line, and that he was too old to be capering around at such a rate, so he sat down on the porch and had a long talk with Aunt Ruth.

Rob and Mr. Meredith took up the subject that supper had interrupted, — boating. Like all other boys he could think of only one thing, and now this was all-absorbing. He detailed their little races and the time they had made, and in turn Mr. Meredith told about some real regattas in which he had participated.

They sat there in the starlight a long while, very happy indeed. Dr. Markham had taken one of Kathie's little hands a prisoner, and after he was through with Aunt Ruth began to question her as to what she had been doing and studying all summer.

"Flowers and birds the most," she said, with a merry laugh, "and a little music."

"I suppose the flowers means that you know how to arrange a bouquet or a dish full in the most artistic manner?"

"No, rather more than that. Aunt Ruth and I have been studying soils, and different modes of treatment, and we have made some quite odd experiments."

"How to turn white roses blue, for instance?"

"No, not that exactly, but we made the red ones a great deal darker, and we have managed to keep our pansies large and velvety, and have raised quantities of little slips."

"Your gardening has done some good, then, beside bringing roses to your cheeks. You and Miss Conover deserve a great deal of credit. What about the birds?"

"O, we have been studying them too, and they are

very quaint, cunning little people. There are blue-birds and martins, wrens and robins of all kinds, and they have nests around everywhere. Then we have Baltimore orioles, cuckoos, thrushes, — ”

“ And a parrot,” said Aunt Ruth, “ which seems to be the greatest trouble of all.”

“ An unmitigated nuisance ! ”

“ But it is Freddy's,” was Kathie's soft rejoinder.

Dr. Markham told her some very curious and entertaining bird-stories, and presently they began to separate for the night. She had only a word with Mr. Meredith, but Rob was in high spirits.

“ He 's just as jolly as he can be, and knows about all kinds of boys' frolics and fun ! Best of all, Kathie, he has promised to go out on our tour ! Won't that be royal ? ”

“ O, I wish I could go too ! ” Kathie said, longingly.

“ Well, you can't ; it 's a boys' party, and there 's no room for girls.”

Kathie began to think that there was n't much room for her, sure enough. The next morning Rob, Mr. Meredith, and Dick Grayson went off boating and fishing, and did not return until three, when Rob flourished his long string of fish in great triumph.

Kathie did not mind so very much, to be sure, for Dr. and Mrs. Markham were to leave early the next morning, and she had spent a very pleasant day entertaining them; but then in the evening Rob walked over to the Darrells' with him, and she saw no more of Mr. Meredith until he ran down the following morning to say good by to his aunt and uncle. Rob marched him off somewhere again, and the two did not come home to dinner.

So Kathie felt rather lonesome in the afternoon. The three ladies sat talking about old times and subjects quite beyond her comprehension. Uncle Robert had gone out on a little business, and Freddy was building a cave, with Jamie Morrison to help.

"O," she thought to herself, "I wonder if Mrs. Morrison's little granddaughter has come? I will go down and see. Mr. Morrison said yesterday that he expected them."

So, donning her sea-side, she walked slowly to the cottage. There was no one in the wide kitchen, and the other windows were darkened; so Kathie did not like to intrude. She seated herself under a great elm and began pulling clover-tops to pieces.

Why was she not real bright-hearted and happy?

She had been counting on this visit, and Dr. Markham, with all his sharp, teasing ways, had been very kind and pleasant; and Mrs. Markham loved her almost like a mother. Did she feel so lonesome because they were gone? There was Mrs. Havens left, and —

Yes, it was something back of this. There was Mr. Meredith, but Rob seemed to have crowded her out of her place. They would go away for a week, perhaps, and take Uncle Robert. Of course they would have a splendid time, and she must stay home.

Kathie had shared her uncle's pleasures so much that it was something of a trial to be put aside for Rob. She almost wished she were a boy, and thought it quite hard not to be counted in their enjoyments. Did Mr. Meredith care for her as much as he used to in New York?

Was she growing selfish and jealous? Why should n't Rob be happy and have a good time? and why should not Mr. Meredith love him, — or at least *like* him very much, for love did n't seem to be just the term to apply to a great boy? She had enjoyed a good many pleasures first and last, and

here she was grudging Rob his share, and a delightful friend also. It certainly was not very kind or sisterly.

Kathie dropped the clover blossoms and covered her face with her hands. She felt pained and humiliated. She had always considered a jealous, grudging spirit most mean and uncomfortable, and here she was indulging in it. With so many pleasures on every hand, she could still long for that bestowed upon another!

"No, I will not," she said, firmly, to herself. "It is pleasant to have Mr. Meredith like Rob, and he needs to be made happy as well as any one else. I won't wish for anything that he has, and I'll try to be satisfied and happy with my own enjoyments."

Up in the sky dwelt her heavenly Father, who had sent her Uncle Robert and one pleasure after another. First of all she must show her gratitude to him by not coveting, but rather rejoicing in, the good fortune of others.

The sweet face cleared up like the sky after a shower. She said a bit of a prayer softly to herself, and then she caught a glimpse of Mrs. Morrison,

with her baby in her arms, opening the sitting-room window.

“O Miss Kathie!”

The child rose and went forward.

“I have some news for you, dear. My brother-in-law and his daughter came about an hour ago. Hugh's away with Mr. Conover, and we were not expecting him — William, I mean — until the late train, if he came at all. Please walk in. Baby is ever so much better.”

The little one had been quite ill, and still had a wan, colorless look. She stretched out her hands to Kathie, of whom she was very fond.

“O Miss Kathie, Ethel is nearly as large as you are, and such a sweet face, not exactly pretty, but there's something very winsome in it; and her hair is light and soft, only it does n't curl like yours. The poor motherless thing in her black dress went to my heart at once.”

“I'm glad she has come,” Kathie replied, with interest. “And that you — like her,” she added, more timidly.

“Yes. I can't quite explain it, Miss Kathie, but there are some children that one does n't take to,

although no one would refuse a motherless child sympathy. I shall like to have her very much, and she 's fond of babies. She was tired, so grandmother thought that she 'd better lie down awhile. I want you to see her."

"And I want to," answered Kathie, warmly.

"William does n't look much like Hugh. He 's larger and fairer, and his beard is almost red, but he has his mother's soft blue eyes. I can't tell you how surprised we were! I don't believe grandmother would have known him, though, if we had not been expecting him."

Kathie went on playing with the baby, but she was thinking of little motherless Ethel.

"When will your uncle be home, Miss Kathie?"

"Not until seven, I believe."

"Their boxes are still at the station. Now if Hugh happened to stop there it would save him another drive. Have your visitors gone?"

"Not all. Mrs. Havens and Mr. Meredith are going to stay a week or two."

"What nice times you have, Miss Kathie, with so many delightful friends! but there is n't any one in the world who deserves it more."

"O Mrs. Morrison, I 'm not always good, or as grateful as I should be, I 'm afraid," she answered, a little remorsefully.

"But you are always making others happy, and it seems to me that is the highest gratitude."

Kathie was silent. Latterly it seemed to her that she had not tried much, but just allowed events to take their own course. Yes, she did need a little rousing.

Presently she turned to go, promising to be in again to-morrow.

"I expect grandmother will take to Ethel wonderfully. Is n't it a pretty name, Miss Kathie?"

Kathie quite agreed there; and it seemed the more interesting to have a name that was entirely new.

So she went home in better spirits, helped Hannah pick the berries for tea, and whipped the cream for the cakes. Just then Mr. Meredith and Rob, and Mr. Langdon, who had been their companion for the day, came sauntering up the path.

They had to wash and dress, and were not down until the bell rang. By this time Uncle Robert had arrived.

Kathie listened with great interest to Rob's adven-

tures. He was in the most extravagant spirits, rather inclined to be boisterous, and quite as large as anybody. Uncle Robert tried to check his exuberance, but did not succeed very well.

Mr. Langdon begged for some music. Aunt Ruth was trying to regain her olden skill, and Kathie had hardly gone far enough to play for company. She wished in her heart that Miss Jessie was here. Mr. Meredith was lounging on the sofa, quite tired with his day's exploits.

Then Kathie remembered that Mrs. Havens played beautifully, so she petitioned, in a half-timid but very graceful fashion.

"What kind of music would you prefer?" she asked.

"O, songs," exclaimed Mr. Langdon; "Miss Kathie sings, I know, for I have heard her."

"I cannot give you anything very fine or elaborate without the music, but I have hosts of old-fashioned songs in my memory."

"And they are just what I like.

"Then let us have more than one voice. It's high time you gentlemen began to be entertaining."

"Come, Meredith, shake off your laziness and rise like the lark."

"My dear fellow, I 'm stiff in every joint, and have an inherited love for laziness. I 'll sing here."

So they tried Annie Laurie, Mary of Argyle, and many others, interspersing the quaint, sweet ballads of olden days with those of more modern date. The gentlemen's voices harmonized finely, and Aunt Ruth's was very sweet. Rob listened until he fell asleep.

"I am very, very much obliged," said Mr. Langdon, as he was bidding them good night. "You are so charming over here that you may expect to see me quite often."

"Kathie," Mr. Meredith began, after Rob had been roused and sent to bed, "I think you are quite neglecting me. Did Dr. Markham carry off every scrap of your heart?"

She laughed a little.

"Come over here and give an account of yourself."

She crossed to the corner of the sofa and seated herself on an ottoman.

"'Are you mad at me?' as the children say."

"Why, no!" and an amused light shone in her eyes.

“Well, then, why are you making yourself cold and stately, like some consequential young woman? Why did n’t you come and sit by me ever so long ago when I beckoned to you?”

She colored a little. Rob had been over in the corner, and she was afraid it would look like crowding in.

“Confess!” and he held up the dimpled chin.

“I think it is the other way, Mr. Meredith,” she said, smilingly; “you have had Mr. Langdon, and — Rob, and boating excursions, so I don’t believe that you have suffered much from neglect.”

He laughed gayly. “But that does n’t excuse you for to-night,” he said.

“I am glad to see Rob like you so much,” she replied; “and he seemed so happy with you —”

She could not have put it in a more delicate fashion; but it was simple truth, and not said for effect. She had been thinking over a little of Uncle Robert’s counsel concerning her brother, and resolved to do her duty cheerfully, even if compelled to renounce her own pleasure.

“My dear child, I understand,” he said, in a deep, tender voice, in which there was not a tinge of *badi-*

nage ; “ but I am not willing to lose my little friend ; and I think I have some claim.”

Her soft, lustrous eyes met his with their shy, girlish glance. What a sweet woman she would make some day, if the world did not spoil her !

CHAPTER XI.

A PLEASURE PARTY.

"WHAT shall we do to-day?" asked Rob, hanging round on the balcony, where Mr. Meredith was smoking.

"I have a fancy that it means to rain by and by, and I have dissipated sufficiently to last me for a day or two, so I think I shall take it easy. Kathie!"

She was going slowly over an exercise, though she had finished her hour's practice. She had begun the day with one of those good and comforting talks she and Uncle Robert enjoyed now and then, and which always strengthened her in following out any resolve.

"Well?" she answered, cheerfully.

"If this is going to be a gray day, would n't it be nice to have Miss Jessie here?"

"O, delightful!" and she ran out to him.

"Suppose we drive over, then?"

"Very well."

Rob jerked off a long spray of honeysuckle. That arrangement did not appear at all entertaining to him.

"I 'll walk down to the stable while I finish my cigar. Can you be ready in five minutes."

"O yes."

She felt as if she wanted to say something to Rob, who was kicking his toe against the stepping-stone, but she could not think of anything that would chime with his disappointed mood and not ruffle him, so she was silent.

"I don't see why they want to be forever hanging round after girls!" Rob grumbled, in supreme contempt, vexed by the defection. "Just as a fellow is ready to have some fun, a girl is always dragged in. Miss Jessie's good enough, but between the two they 'll keep him cooped up in the library or some place, and it's too bad! I don't believe it will rain, either!"

Kathie came down fresh and dainty in her white dress and simple hat. The morning was very pleasant even if it was gray, and the drive lovely.

Miss Jessie received them very cordially, though

she said she was afraid that they did not deserve it. What were they doing all day yesterday?

"Kathie, like the small angel that she is, stayed at home contented. We 'boys' were off on a cruise."

"Kathie, I think we ought to be jealous," said Miss Jessie.

Kathie had an instinctive feeling that Miss Jessie possessed the right so to do, but her brief spasm was over.

"Why don't they ask us to go out boating, and all that? And you are going to have a grand excursion all by yourselves, which is very selfish, you must admit."

"Indeed, I wish you would go. I dare say there 'll be hours in which we shall long for a civilized face. Kathie, can't you manage it some way?"

"We might take a hammock along, and sleep in that," said Miss Jessie, with a good-natured laugh.

Mr. Meredith told his errand, and, while he was coaxing, Kathie slipped out to see grandmother and Mrs. Darrell. Charlie was building a trellis for a running rose, and Kathie made him promise to come over to tea.

Mr. Meredith's arguments were conclusive, for

Miss Jessie changed her dress and returned with them, but she still teased him about his devotion to the sea, as she laughingly called it.

"What a pity we are not boys for a little while!" she said, as she was laying off her hat in Kathie's room. "It would be real charming to go on this expedition they are talking about."

"I wish we could, but we can't"; and Kathie sighed.

"No, I suppose not."

"Just in time," exclaimed Mr. Meredith, as they came down. "It is beginning to rain."

Poor Rob found indoor occupations very dull, and had to come to the girls at last. They played games, told riddles, had a very gay time at blind-man's-buff, and sang all the comic songs they could remember. Mrs. Havens was very genial, and did not disdain youthful merriment; in fact, although at middle life, she was one of the women who would never grow old.

The storm set in severely at nightfall. Uncle Robert declared that Miss Jessie and Charlie could not go home, so they sent for Mr. Langdon, and had some dancing. Finally they insisted that Aunt Ruth should try, and they managed to have several very

amusing quadrilles. Mrs. Havens and Miss Jessie became capital friends.

Tired out at length, they sat down in a circle, and had some pleasant conversation until bedtime.

"Cedarwood is the most charming place in the world," Mr. Langdon declared with his good night.

Kathie came down quite early the next morning, and found Uncle Robert alone in the library.

"Well, birdie," he said, kissing her fondly, "you bear your last night's dissipation admirably. Why, you would do for a campaign!"

"Miss Jessie and I both wish that we could take one," she replied.

"Where, pansy-eyes?"

"Out in the woods and down the river, just as you are going to do."

"Mr. Meredith spoke of it yesterday. I think it would be very nice if it could be arranged. We shall have to change our plan somewhat."

"Would you like it?" and her lustrous eyes beamed with pleasure.

"O, very much. Our party will be larger than I thought for in the beginning. We shall take Rob and Charlie and Dick, and I fancy that Mr. Langdon

would like to join us. If we could get some one to watch over you two girls ! ”

“ O, I believe that Mrs. Havens would,” exclaimed Kathie. “ She went out with a party once. If Aunt Ruth were real strong, or mamma — ”

“ Mamma thinks she cannot go, for Freddy would be such a constant care. I am not sure about Aunt Ruth. We should stop at hotels or farm-houses, and make the journey easy. Mrs. Havens would be capital to take charge of you all. We will consider the project.”

Kathie was delighted with this. The matter was duly considered and discussed, but when Rob heard of it he was sorely disappointed.

“ It will not be half so nice with a lot of girls ! ” he exclaimed, in a tone of vexation. “ They could n’t sleep in the woods and rough it, and they always get tired, or catch cold, or something. It will spoil all the fun ! ”

“ No, I think not. When we find them in the way we will leave them at a hotel. Some of our amusements they would hardly care about. However, we will see.”

In the midst of the excitement, Kathie did not

forget little Ethel Morrison. She went over to the cottage at her first leisure.

Ethel sat on a low bench, holding the baby. She was very sweet-looking in spite of her awkward black dress. Fair, and rather pale, with an abundance of light hair tinged with gold, and beautiful deep-blue eyes, though otherwise, as her aunt had said, she was not pretty. She was so shy that Kathie did not make much of an acquaintance. Mrs. Alston had better success, for somehow she experienced a warm interest in the motherless child. Grandmother Morrison had grown very fond of her already.

Mr. Morrison was a large, fresh-looking man, altogether unlike his brother, but with a fine genial face that quite won Kathie.

“He looks like a hero,” she said.

“I ’d like to know what he has ever been heroic about,” exclaimed Rob. “Now, Mr. Meredith is my idea of a hero. He shows that he has some soul and some grit in him, and when he ’s rowing it ’s just like a picture!”

Kathie wondered why the old scene with General Mackenzie should rush over her so vividly. She really loved Mr. Meredith too well to question anything

that he might do, and yet — some men put duties in the place of pleasures. Then Kathie became confused with a tangled mass of thought, and, for fear she might blame ever so slightly, dropped it all.

“Yes, Mr. Meredith is splendid, grand! I'd like to be just such a man!” pursued the boy.

“You don't think him better than Uncle Robert?” Kathie asked, in amaze; for her uncle was her ideal, and kind of Sir Galahad for kindness, strength, and truth.

“Well, they're so different. Uncle Robert is good and noble and all that, and is doing more for us than many would, and I don't want you to think that I fail to appreciate him. But there's a dash and vim about Mr. Meredith, and” — Rob colored and hesitated — “he is n't quite so strict about some things. He does n't believe that if you smoke a cigar or get a little wild that you're going straight to destruction. He understands that boys must be boys, and how he did laugh about my fight with Lu Simonds! If he gave me one black eye, I have the comfort of knowing that I gave him two!”

“O Rob!”

“Yes, the mean, cowardly sneak! He's telling

all over that if I were to go to the Academy next year he would not. He need n't trouble himself. I 'd be sorry to get in such company again."

"But he smokes and swears, and spends a good deal of money," said Kathie; "and Uncle Robert is strict about some of these things, because he knows how injurious they are."

"Well, I 'm not speaking up for them. The fact is, Kathie, you can't understand the matter at all. If I were a girl, your philosophy might be very good for me, but it 's not exactly the thing for men. We boys are different altogether."

Rob uttered this in a grand style, as if he supposed that it would quite extinguish any girl's temerity.

"Uncle Robert is a Christian gentleman," she said, softly.

"And don't you call Mr. Meredith a gentleman, or Mr. Langdon?" Rob flared up rather fiercely at this.

"Yes, they are gentlemen."

"What 's the difference then?"

"Uncle Robert does his good and noble deeds because he believes them to be right, and if he had to make ever so great a sacrifice he would still do

them. Mr. Meredith likes what is easy and pleasant, and that suits him. He is very kind and — ”

“ You don't know anything about it, Kathie. Girls *can't* understand ! ” rejoined Rob, in a positive tone that settled the argument.

Kathie made no reply. It was like treason not to approve of everything Mr. Meredith did ; indeed, his acts were unquestionable ; it was only his careless talking that occasionally pained her.

Although there was very little said about the tour, the matter was under earnest consideration. Mr. Meredith took a mysterious journey off somewhere and was gone all night. In the mean while there was no lack of amusement. Rambles to the woods, rides, boating excursions, croquet at home, gardening, and, not least of all, music, made the time pass fleetly enough.

Upon Mr. Meredith's return he held a long consultation with Uncle Robert. Then they went up to Aunt Ruth's room and had a talk with the ladies, Kathie being dismissed.

After supper that evening Uncle Robert announced the plans. The pleasure tour was to be quite altered, and include a large party.

"Oh!" exclaimed Rob with a vexatious curl of the lip.

Mr. Meredith laughed.

"We won't have any fun at all. Girls can't sleep out of doors on the ground, or take long tramps, and I don't see what you are going to do with them!"

"This, Rob," said his uncle, calmly. "We shall go down to Croftsbury by railroad, and at that point take a yacht for a week and journey down the river. The scenery is very wild, and will be quite new to you; we can sleep on land or water as we like, camp out, hunt and fish, have dinners in the woods, and I really think you will find enough amusement."

"A yacht!" was all he could answer in his surprise.

"Yes, and with a regular old salt for captain," said Mr. Meredith.

Rob could not make another objection. The girls dwindled beside a regular sailing vessel and a sea-captain. And if anything happened to them it would be their own fault, plainly, for wishing to go along.

"You don't really mean it? Who will go and take care of us?" exclaimed Kathie, breathlessly.

"Mrs. Havens has promised. Aunt Ruth will accompany us also."

Kathie clasped her uncle's hand in delight.

"And if mamma could!"

"There is barely room for four in your cabin," exclaimed Mr. Meredith, "and it will not be quite like having a large house to ramble over. But I think I can promise a good time."

"You girls will get sick," said Rob, loftily.

"I guess not"; and Kathie gave a fearless laugh.

"Our boat is engaged for next Monday noon, so we have all this time to make arrangements. Mrs. Havens will see to whatever traps you girls want, and I will look after the boys."

"And I must go over and announce the fact to Charlie and Miss Jessie," said Mr. Meredith, rising.

"Hurrah! It *is* jolly, and no mistake! A regular yacht, and a whole week of cruising!"

With that Rob executed a double shuffle, a grand pirouette, and a lofty somerset, and it seemed a little doubtful at first which end he would finally settle upon, his head or his heels.

"Suppose we step into Mr. Grayson's, Rob," said his uncle. "I want to talk the matter over."

Rob was delighted. Kathie, being left alone, went back to Aunt Ruth's room.

"I am so glad that you are going too," she said, clasping her arms around Aunt Ruth's neck. "What a pleasant party we shall have! O Mrs. Havens, it was so good in you to promise to take care of us."

"Thank you, my dear; I expect to enjoy the frolic very much myself. There is some fine scenery down the river, and an iron-mine also. When we are tired of sailing we can ramble about on the land."

"It will be just delightful! I am so glad that we can go. It would be too bad for the boys to have all the nice times."

Mrs. Havens smiled. "You would make a nice time anywhere, Kathie," she said, patting the little girl's soft cheek.

"Dick is all right," announced Rob an hour or so later, as he entered the room, "and Mr. Langdon is wonderfully interested. They 're all coming here to-morrow, and we are going to make out a list of necessary articles and send a trunk off to Croftsburg on Saturday. I say, is n't this a gay thing!"

Miss Jessie was included in the "all," but the ladies held a consultation by themselves.

"We must make our attire as simple as possible," Mrs. Havens said. "We need about two changes in case of getting wet, or any accident; the largest kind of a sun-hat, stout boots, and a large plaid beside a waterproof. Our dresses must be short, and something that we do not value. Any half-worn garment will do to alter over."

So they went to work. Miss Jessie made a pretty gray suit trimmed with scarlet, and Aunt Ruth had one trimmed with blue. Kathie's was green, and Mr. Meredith declared that she looked like a little mermaiden in it.

Mrs. Havens was just the kind of woman to marshal such a party. Ladylike and refined, but full of good-humor and merriment, with a quick eye and a great deal of good sense. Mrs. Alston was quite satisfied to leave all the management to her.

So by Saturday they had all things in readiness. The trunk was packed, and a case that contained fishing-rods and several articles for which Mr. Meredith had sent to New York. Dick, Rob, and Charlie were in the highest state of anticipation.

Mrs. Alston and Freddy were to go to Croftsburg and see the voyagers started on their journey. Fred-

dy thought it very hard not to be included in the party, but Kathie comforted him by promising that Mr. Morrison should teach him to drive Hero, and Uncle Robert gave him a dollar to spend just as he liked.

It was quite cloudy on Sunday evening, and Rob worked himself into a fever, dreading the rain.

"Then we can start on Tuesday," said Mr. Meredith, with a teasing smile.

"That would n't be half so good. I do hate to be disappointed!"

Looking at the boy's eager face it was evident. And as Mr. Meredith thought of the great, untried world that stretched out before him, and the strength to battle with it which lay half developed in the straight brows, resolute eyes, and broad chin, he wondered if the struggle would be fierce, and who would come off conqueror. He had taken a strange interest in them all, and this sight carried him back to his own impetuous, wilful, and careless boyhood. He felt at that moment there were many things he would fain blot out, and almost envied the boy's innocence. Only a moment, and then he was his usual gay, laughing self.

It did not rain, and they all started in high spirits the next morning. Croftsburg was about twelve miles down the river, and was the point where navigation for craft of any size ceased to be practicable. Quite a busy little town, with brigs, schooners, tugs, and a steamboat or two, lying at the wharf.

They went to the hotel, where Captain Watson was awaiting them. The goods were taken down and stored on board, and they had their dinner. The remainder of the necessary articles had been placed in the captain's charge before, and were all safe, he promised them, with a rather jolly wink out of his left eye.

Mrs. Alston went down to the wharf. There was the Pilgrim, trim and jaunty, her colors flying, and she shining from stem to stern with a coat of fresh paint.

Mamma must go down in the cabin and see how it looked; but it seemed very small indeed. There were four berths in a tiny space, but it was nice and clean in spite of the curious watery smell. There was a table in the cabin, an abundant supply of stools, two easy-chairs, and a swinging lamp depending from the ceiling.

“That ’s gay and festive !” declared Rob ; and Miss Jessie confessed that it was very nice.

“ Good by,” said everybody, kissing mamma and Freddy.

“ Have a nice time ; and O, bring them home safely, Captain Watson.”

“ There ’s not a bit of danger, ma’am. It ’s not like the open sea.”

“ Good by !” was Rob’s last shout.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIRST DAY OUT.

THEY all stood on deck and waved their handkerchiefs as the Pilgrim slid gracefully out into the channel. There was a stiff breeze, and both wind and tide were in their favor. Croftsburg began to recede. The tall, smoky chimney and great red-brick factories, ugly enough when at hand, were tinted and subdued by the golden sunshine of ripening July. The banks on either side grew greener, and a little bend in the river shut off the unsightly town.

The boys ran about wild. Captain Watson was at the helm, and a great stout fellow, as tall, but not more than eighteen, with a sunbrowned face and tarry hands, was busy about here and there, and laughed at the questions with which the boys plied him. The gentlemen were sauntering around and taking observations, and Mrs. Havens and Aunt Ruth were unpacking and stowing away a few articles.

"What ought we to do?" asked Kathie, wonderingly, of Miss Jessie.

"I don't know, really. It's my first sea-voyage down a river, so I think I shall go on deck. There's a nice awning and some seats."

"We are coming too," said Mrs. Havens.

They soon seated themselves and began to enjoy the scenes through which they passed. Here were orchards and cornfields, there wide-spreading meadows astir with busy life. Sturdy mowers, in their shirt-sleeves, swinging their scythes with wide sweeps, or pausing to whet them with dim sound musically borne on the wind. Lower down stood two great wagons, on which the men were pitching the fragrant hay. A group of youngsters ran shouting around, or climbed atop the load when the homeward word was given, barefooted, but with rosy, laughing faces, and voices that rang clear and merry on the summer air.

"What a beautiful picture!" exclaimed Miss Jessie.

Lovely indeed, with its vistas of trees beyond, its shimmering light and shade, its birds that made vocal all the leafy coverts. What painter can give such tone, such wonderful depth?

Then a little nest of a village, with white-spined church; old red school-house, where the faces of mischievous urchins peeped unexpectedly out of the narrow windows; a dory with its two fishermen; small boats, idly seeking pleasure or fun; or a solitary angler intent upon perch or pickerel.

Kathie thought that she could watch forever. The three gentlemen came and sat by them, and the little group fell into an entertaining conversation. Yet it seemed so odd and weird to Kathie, — as if she were floating off somewhere in a dream, or to the wonder-land of her yesterday's childhood.

"Well, Charlie," Uncle Robert asked, presently, "have you been taking lessons? How many knots an hour?"

Charlie laughed. "Rob 's the sailor," he said. "He takes to it naturally. The shores are so beautiful that I want to look at them continually. Just see the flowers, Jessie!"

Fleets of cardinal-flowers in their flaming array, lifting up their slender heads like sentinels; pale-blue water-lilies, slender ferns, and overhanging trails of clematis and ground-ivy, with the trees for background, and now and then a huge rock;

the perfect loveliness of nature everywhere. Charlie's heart was strangely stirred.

Rob bore down upon them presently, and then the conversation took a gay turn. He could not tease the girls, for they were neither homesick nor seasick, so he bewildered them with a host of nautical phrases.

Mrs. Havens glanced at her watch. "Why, would you believe that it is six o'clock?" she said.

Every one exclaimed at the shortness of the afternoon.

"Kathie, I guess we'll go below and get supper. We will be housekeepers to-night, taking our turn first, before we are sea-sick."

Kathie laughed at that, and was pleased to accompany her.

Levi, the mate, as Rob had dubbed him, brought them some boiling water, and Mrs. Havens made tea. They had provided themselves with all necessary edibles, some canned fruit, and some nicely pickled salmon. The boys, in true sailor fashion, had insisted upon hard-tack, and here it was in abundance. They laid a white cloth upon the table, arranged their dishes, and displayed their tempting viands.

"All hands below!" shouted Rob, as he and Dick went skylarking down.

"This is quite a feast!" declared Mr. Langdon.

Captain Watson, at their urgent request, had left Levi at the helm and joined the party.

"It's a long while since I've had so gay a company on board," he said, "and ladies too."

"They certainly add to the enjoyment," Mr. Langdon rejoined with a smile.

Hannah's home-made bread did not go begging. Even Rob left off crunching hard-tack, which he had undertaken so heroically, and returned to it. And the canned strawberries tasted deliciously here.

"Still, this is landsmen's fare," said Mr. Meredith. "To-morrow we must have some fish, perhaps a dish of chowder. I suppose we will all have to take our turn at cooking?"

"Yes, indeed," was Mrs. Havens's response.

"Then chowder shall be my dish."

"You'll have to be up at daybreak catching your fish," laughed Mr. Langdon. "I should propose turtle soup if there was any chance of the turtle."

"I'll consider what sort of surprise I shall give you," said Uncle Robert.

They were a very merry party indeed. The boys laughed over everything as only boys can, and when the captain saw how easily they were amused, he rather helped the fun along.

Then the dishes were washed and stored away safely in the locker, and all hands went on deck again. Levi began to spin a wonderful yarn to the boys, and the others gathered in a little group, Mr. Meredith on Miss Jessie's side, and Kathie leaning her head against her uncle's shoulder. The wind died down with the sun, there was no rustle along the banks, and the twilight grew stiller and stiller, while the hemlocks and beeches sent long shadows over the placid river. Then the moon began to rise; they had so timed their voyage as to have some enjoyment by night as well.

"Sing," said Miss Jessie, presently, to Mr. Meredith.

He began a quaint German college song, the refrain of which the others knew well, and the mellow voices joined in the chorus. The tuneful echoes seemed to gather in the nooks along the shore, and answer them in soft cadences.

Captain Watson reached a little haven that he knew well and cast anchor for the night. The boys rushed

to see this proceeding, and tried afterward to imitate Levi's cry, making every variety of sound.

"I suppose we may as well turn in," exclaimed Uncle Robert, "or, in landsman's English, go to bed."

"I 'd like to sleep up here on deck," declared Rob. "I wish I could."

"And take a journey to the bottom if the Pilgrim should happen to give a lurch?" asked Mr. Meredith.

"Not outside the rail. I 'd stop when I was there."

It seemed very odd indeed to Kathie to climb into the little nest. Aunt Ruth took the lower berth. Kathie kissed her again and again, and was anxious to know if she was enjoying the journey. Then she said her prayers reverently, and laid her golden-crowned head on the pillow.

"But — O Aunt Ruth! — if I should fall out?"

"I 'll fall out to keep you company," said Miss Jessie, from the opposite side.

Kathie felt almost timid at first, but she soon became used to the rocking motion and the soft swash of the water against the sides of the vessel. Thinking of mamma and Freddy, miles away, she fell asleep.

The boys were up at daybreak the next morning, watching Captain Watson weigh anchor, and trim the sails, as a fresh breeze was blowing. They soon filled with wind, and the Pilgrim went scudding along bravely for two hours. By this time the ladies were up and had breakfast ready; and as Rob caught the steam of the fragrant coffee a most voracious appetite woke within him.

Then the wind died down altogether, and the tide was running slowly. The lately buoyant sails hung listlessly at the mast, and, hemmed in by the high hills on either side, there was scarcely a breath of air. They made several useless tacks.

"Becalmed!" laughed Mr. Meredith.

"Then we may as well go ashore. The boys want a ramble."

"Very well," responded Captain Watson.

So the word of command was given. Mrs. Havens packed a hamper of necessary articles, and the girls each took their plaids. The little boat that had been swinging at the Pilgrim's side was lowered, and the ladies were handed in carefully, though with much merriment, and rowed to the bank. Then the boat returned and the gentlemen followed, — Levi,

quite delighted with the privilege of accompanying them, carrying the hamper.

The three elders had their guns and game-bags, in which were various traps, slung over their shoulders.

Rob was in an ecstasy of delight. "This is gay!" he declared, assisting Miss Jessie up the rather steep cliff; "now for a grand old day in the woods!"

Up the party trudged, scrambling, slipping, and laughing. Each one had a mite to add to the general fund of merriment; indeed, Mrs. Havens kept in the most charming spirits.

By and by they reached a level space, and though the grove was still dense there was no underbrush, but the thickest, softest moss, interspersed with various lichens and tiny blossoms. They were rather tired after their jaunt, especially Aunt Ruth.

"Suppose we keep house here to-day," said Uncle Robert; "we shall scarcely find a lovelier spot. We boys want to amuse ourselves with a little hunting. First, though, let us see if we can find a spring anywhere around."

They took quite a search. Mr. Langdon was the first to make the discovery; but the spring was about a quarter of a mile farther down.

"The place is as fine as this, though," he said.

So they took up their line of march, and were soon settled in their new quarters. Kathie discovered a large flat stone, raised about a foot above the surface of the ground.

"O," she exclaimed, "here is an elegant table!"

Uncle Robert had brought the hammock and fastened that securely, then with the shawls he arranged a comfortable sofa, with the edge of the table-rock for its back. Having seen the ladies comfortably settled, they gathered their guns and ammunition and strolled away, promising to be back in time for dinner.

Miss Jessie read aloud for a while, and the two elder ladies crocheted. But after a little she laid down her book and asked Kathie if she did not want a ramble.

"Yes, indeed," was the answer.

"Then we'll make a voyage of discovery."

"Don't get lost," cautioned Mrs. Havens.

"We ought to have some hard-tack to sprinkle along our path," laughed Kathie.

"O, I shall not be so cruel as were Hop-o'-my-Thumb's parents," returned Miss Jessie.

They tied on their hats and went off, nodding gayly. For a while they followed the course of the spring, a mere thread in the grass and moss, but gurgling pleasantly along its way. Over to the westward, opposite the shore-edge, stretched hills and vales, wooded or with low-growing shrubs, and here and there a patch of rolling meadow-land. They found a number of very odd wild-flowers and an abundance of wintergreen berries.

Kathie was a very companionable little girl, vivacious without boldness, and tender without affectation. Between her and Miss Jessie there appeared to be growing up a peculiar friendship; perhaps because Miss Jessie felt that Kathie must know or suspect her secret, and yet with the rarest delicacy never alluded to it, and indulged in no childish teasing or by-play. She felt very free and at her ease when in the child's society, and understood and appreciated the warm regard Kathie gave.

"Look at those low bushes over there, Kathie," she said. "They seem to me like blueberries. Hark!"

Two or three sharp cracks of fire-arms sounded in the distance.

“O!” exclaimed Kathie, “they are shooting. I hope we are not within range.”

“The sound is too far off for them to do us any injury. Let us look at the shrubs.”

Blueberries, sure enough, large and deliciously ripe. No one save the birds had shared their sweetness as yet.

“What a solitary place!” exclaimed Kathie, glancing around. “There is not a house in sight.”

“It seems as if we were a hundred miles from Brookside, and yet it lies over in one of those shadowy blue vales at the north.”

Kathie was eating blueberries. “We ought to take some back,” she said.

“Yes, I was thinking of it. We might pin some leaves together and make a basket.”

The oak leaves were glossy and strong, and the largest they could find about. They gathered slender sticks and stout pine-needles and fastened together quite a patch, then they began to pick berries and deposit the handfuls on their mat of oak leaves. It was filled very soon.

“O, here’s a great burdock,” exclaimed Kathie. “Let’s make a basket.”

It was less work to manufacture this into shape, and they went to picking again.

"We have as much as three quarts, and all we can take," said Miss Jessie. "They will make us a nice dessert. Kathie, do you know the way back?"

Kathie started, and gave a long, long look.

"I think it is in this direction. We passed a clump of chestnut-trees, and here is one."

"I am really puzzled, but I have the same feeling about it. We'll try."

They went on cautiously. "There's the spring," exclaimed Kathie at length, as she heard its silvery tones over the pebbles.

"O, now we are all right"; and Miss Jessie drew a relieved breath.

They soon found their companions. It was so early that they determined to make another berry excursion. By the time of the second return they saw the male portion of the party straggling through the trees.

"Such sport!" exclaimed Rob, triumphantly. "I've shot three myself, and Uncle Robert let me load the gun. Why, it's nothing!"

Kathie's tender little heart ached a moment. To

be sure, the birdies were dead and out of pain; but why should their simple, joyous lives be so ruthlessly ended?

"I suppose we must all turn cooks," said Mr. Meredith. "O, look at these berries! Where did you find them, girls?"

"We went hunting too," declared Miss Jessie, with an arch smile.

Mr. Meredith scooped up a handful, and confessed that they were delicious.

"Come, boys, look for some dry wood. Did n't we bring a hatchet?"

The hatchet was found, and the three youngsters started for some fuel.

Mr. Langdon and Uncle Robert soon improvised a fireplace with some stones and a couple of forked sticks. Mr. Meredith went at dressing the birds. Levi filled the kettle and suspended it in true gypsy fashion. Kathie and Miss Jessie began to arrange the table.

"Where's the tea?" said Mrs. Havens. "I am sure that I put in some."

"O, if you have forgotten the tea!" and Mr. Meredith looked threatening.

"You are such an inveterate grandmother!" laughed Mrs. Havens.

"Well, I 'll console myself with a cigar. Kathie, have you turned Chinaman and devoured half a pound of tea in our absence?"

"O, here it is!" and the small package was produced.

"Well for you that you found it!"

The tea was made, and then Uncle Robert began to broil the birds. Being an old campaigner, he understood the art perfectly. The savory fragrance sharpened their appetites.

"Here is nectar and ambrosia, a feast fit for kings!"

"With four-and-twenty blackbirds broiled in a pie," chanted Mr. Langdon in so comical a tone that the boys set up a shout.

They drew near their sylvan table and seated themselves on the mossy ground.

"Here are the dryads and Ganymedes," said Mr. Meredith, with a flourish. "My friends, thrice welcome to the feast!"

Rob declared that they had three courses, — two of birds and one of bones. Never was a dinner enjoyed

with keener relish. Then the gentlemen felt lazy and spread themselves out on the grass. Levi thought he would go down to the boat and see what the prospect was.

Mr. Meredith and Miss Jessie found a cosy nook to themselves, Mr. Conover lay on the grass beside Aunt Ruth, and Mr. Langdon told Kathie about a voyage he once made up the Rhine. The boys grew restless, and finally rambled out of the circle.

"Don't go very far," said Uncle Robert.

Dick had his gun. They started over the ridge where they had been in the morning, and for nearly half an hour Uncle Robert heard a faint report of the gun. Levi came back with the word that both wind and tide were in their favor, and that the captain was ready to start. The ladies began to pick up their shawls and other belongings.

"I wish the boys would come," said Uncle Robert.

"They 'll be along presently. Let us walk down, though Levi might stay here," was Mr. Meredith's response.

Levi signified his willingness.

They all felt quite fresh, and descended the cliff in gay spirits. Captain Watson had been fishing, as he "supposed they were almost starved," he said.

Kathie gave him a glowing account of the day and the dinner, ending with, "You missed a good deal by not coming."

"So I see, my little lady."

"What can keep the boys?" Uncle Robert was growing anxious.

"I 'll walk back with you, Conover," said Mr. Meredith.

They found Levi perched on their late table, a picture of resignation and patience. Not a sight nor sound had he been vouchsafed.

"They are lost, I am afraid. Do you know anything about these woods, Levi?"

Levi did not.

"I wish I had my rifle," exclaimed Mr. Meredith. "Levi, suppose you run down for it."

The youth was absent a long while. The two men walked up and down impatiently. The darkness began to gather here in the thick woods, and the shrill voices of insects were starting into a chorus. To spend a night here might not be unpleasant if one were prepared for it; both of them had done the like many a time before, but searching or anxious watching did not look so inviting.

The rifle made its appearance at last, and Mr. Meredith fired several times in quick succession. In vain they waited for an answer. The woods grew darker and more solemn.

"The ladies were quite alarmed," Levi remarked.

"We may as well go down, Meredith, for if the boys have lost their way they can hardly find it again in this darkness. And one might as well look for the world-renowned needle in a haystack."

So they retraced their steps to the boat.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NIGHT IN THE WOODS.

WHEN the three boys started away that afternoon they scarcely noticed the direction they were taking, so intent were they upon amusement. They shot several times, but as game appeared rather scarce they kept on, hardly thinking of the passing time. Indeed, an hour out there seemed a very brief space.

The ground began to descend after a while. "I think we could go out this way to the river," Rob said.

"But it might make our walk longer, and really, Rob, we must set our faces toward the encampment," Dick Grayson answered.

"Just one more shot. Look what a sight!"

Rob was becoming a most enthusiastic sportsman. He fired now into a flock of birds and brought down three, two of which had been killed instantly.

"Now let's turn about," began Charlie, anxiously. "I feel quite sure that the road by the river would

be the most direct. You remember that we could look straight down it this morning."

Dick was a little dubious, and finally came over to Rob's side.

"If we could have a look at the sun!"

"Well, you see by the rays that it is going down over there, and the river is east of it," was the positive rejoinder.

Charlie could not gainsay that fact, but he had a misgiving that they were going wrong. Still, he knew by experience that he seldom convinced Rob of any fact unless he could place the proofs directly before his eyes, so he walked on briskly, trying to hope that they would come out all right.

The woods grew more dense, and they began to find that they had left the hill. The ground was covered with damp, rank moss, and there was a peculiar scent that indicated water.

"We shall be there soon," said Rob. "You can hear the river."

And yet they did not reach it very speedily. On they travelled through underbrush and luxuriant vines, and now the sun had left them entirely.

"I wish we had gone back," said Charlie, slowly.

"Don't be a baby ! Why, I should n't mind being in the woods all night."

"But the others will be alarmed."

Rob thought of the night that Freddy was out in the boat. They were in no danger of death or accident, to be sure, but after all it was n't exactly comfortable.

"We'll have to make the best of it," exclaimed Dick, cheerfully. "Here we come to something, but I am afraid it is not Guilford River."

A small stream flowing through the woods, and a descent over the stones in one place had caused the tidelike murmur. They glanced at each other with blank faces. Rob broke into a gay laugh, for the comicality of the scene was too much for him.

"We are lost !" declared Dick.

"That's just it."

"I'm awful tired"; and Charlie dropped down on a moss-grown stump.

"Well, let's rest awhile and consider," began Dick, good-humoredly. "Charlie, in which direction do you think Guilford River lies ?"

Charlie meditated. "This way," was his slow answer.

"It seems to me that is just north. Now I should say straight over."

"But this stream must empty into the river."

"I suppose it does. Well, it can't be very far. If you are rested, let us tramp on."

Rob had said nothing. He had a fancy that they were both wrong, or else he must be greatly so. He picked up and went on sturdily.

The stream wound around, and, if the boys had but known it, they were no nearer their destination after half an hour's walk.

"Why did n't we climb a tree and take a good view?" began Rob. "I'm going to do it now, for I don't believe that we are right, after all."

The sun had gone down, and nearly half the sky seemed full of rosy clouds, so it would be difficult to tell which was the south and which the west. They ascended a tall chestnut and took a survey. They appeared to be in something of a valley, for above them there was a range of woody hills, and below them a precisely similar one. On either side an indentation which *might* be the river, but they were so turned around that not one of them could tell.

"Well, Charlie," said Rob, rather teasingly.

"I wish we were back ; but I am afraid we shall not be to-night."

"No, we may as well give that up and wait until sunrise ; so it 's no use rambling about to no purpose. Let us choose a nice spot and encamp."

They looked around. The darkness was coming down upon them very fast.

"We may as well be jolly!" said Rob ; "I only wish we had something to eat. Suppose we make a fire and cook our birds. Have either of you a match?"

Charlie had not. Dick searched everywhere, turned his pockets wrong side out, and finally found one that had slipped in the cover of his memorandum-book.

"Just one chance!" exclaimed Rob, soberly.

"Powder and shot are all gone too ; I gave you my last."

They collected some dry leaves and twigs, and Rob had a little paper. "Who is sure-handed?" he asked. "Dick, I think you had better try the match."

He was a trifle nervous over their solitary chance. However, it was a success, and the twigs soon went

to blazing. They threw brush and dead branches upon this, and in a few moments had a glowing fire. The next thing was to dress the birds. There were nine of them, just three apiece. Before long they were sputtering and scenting the air with their appetizing fragrance.

The boys were very hungry, and though the broiling might not have been done to a turn, even the burnt ends tasted good. They took a drink out of the stream at its clearest place, and then began to discuss what provision must be made for sleeping.

"As we are neither birds nor chickens, we can't try a tree," exclaimed Dick, laughingly, "so we must be content with the ground. I guess it won't give us the rheumatism."

Charlie looked soberly into the flaring fire. He was not particularly timid, but he could n't help thinking of Jessie and Kathie, and the Pilgrim at anchor. It seemed very lonesome out here in the woods.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," said Rob, reassuringly; "that is, brigands or wild animals. Still I wish we had a little powder and shot."

"We 'll be asleep in five minutes after we 're settled, for I 'm tired as a dog," was Dick's rejoinder.

"Let us make up a good fire, and there 'll be no need of any one watching."

No one negatived the proposition. Truth to tell, they were all sleepy and tired, and the heat of the fire had made them still more drowsy. Rob brought an armful of sticks and piled them on compactly, then threw himself down on the soft turf, thinking of Indian wigwams, trail-hunters, trappers, and a confused series of dime-novels. He used to fancy that he would like such a life. Well, it was n't so bad, after all!

"You 're taking it comfortably," said Dick, with a laugh.

"Well, why not? Charlie, are you homesick?"

"No," was the soft, sweet answer; and Rob could not find it in his heart to go on teasing him.

Some impulse led him to turn his head presently. Charlie was kneeling at a little distance, his hands clasped and his head bowed.

It gave the boy a peculiar sensation. He always said his prayers at home, of course, but last night, in the excitement, he had forgotten all about it. He put his hand over on Dick's warm face. "Dick," he whispered, softly, "did you say your prayers?"



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"Yes," was the answer, in as low a tone; "I want God to keep me safely on this of all nights."

So Rob began "Our Father who art in heaven," to himself. It was a very lazy way of praying, and his conscience smote him a little, but somehow he had n't the courage and energy to rise.

The moon was up and sent a few lance-like rays through the thick foliage. The wind rustled fitfully now and then, and bore to them the faint sound of a distant owl, whose melancholy lament was nearly drowned by the shriller voices that break the stillness of a summer's night.

Charlie crept up to the little circle, and they all said a pleasant good-night to each other. In five minutes Rob was asleep, and Dick soon followed. Charlie lay awake watching the blaze that was gradually fading. They had managed so that there should be no danger of setting the woods on fire, and he was not frightened or lonely, but still an awesome feeling came over him. However, he was too weary long to resist sweet sleep.

What startled Rob some time in the night he could hardly remember, — most of all, I think, an uneasy position and a sense of chilliness. He rose

suddenly on his elbow and wondered where he was. Not at home in his comfortable bed, not even on board the Pilgrim. Then he remembered the day's adventures and peered about in the darkness. The fire had gone out, the moon was down, the wind rustled through the trees, and at a little distance the stream fretted over the stones. It was so solemnly still that Rob's heart fluttered a trifle, and his breath came in gasps. He felt for his companions and found them safe.

Then he heard a strange sound. A snore or groan that did not come from their party, he was quite sure. A stealthy rustle among the dead leaves, and then all the horrible stories he had ever read of midnight assassins, robbers who lived in woods and caves, and lunatics who had broken from their confinement, rushed over him. The sound was repeated—yes, he was quite sure it was a groan. What if some one had been murdered at a short distance!

Rob's hair fairly stood on end. He was no coward, but it was not pleasant to be there either with a murdered man or a murderer, and unarmed, as one might say. Then suppose they should get into some difficulty about it and be kept from their party! Should he wake the boys?

He found Dick's gun, and grasped it nervously. He might deal a good blow with it, if it came to self-defence. Another of those groans, and he shivered.

Dick stirred and threw out his hands, the sudden contact startling him into wakefulness.

"Hillo!" he cried in surprise. "Is it you, Rob, or Charlie?"

"Hush!" returned Rob, in a low tone.

"Why — O, we are out in the woods, are n't we? You have n't been awake all night, Rob? I've slept like a trooper, but I feel stiff and cold. Our fire's out too."

"Hush!" softly, and grasping Dick's arm.

"O, what's that? Is Charlie safe?" and then it was Dick's turn to tremble. "Have you heard it long?"

"No; that is, — I have n't been awake very long. What can we do, Dick?"

"Nothing in this pitchy darkness. We'll have to wait until morning. How long, I wonder?"

"I wish I could see my watch."

"Some poor fellow's been hurt, half killed maybe."

That solution comforted Rob a little. Perhaps the person had n't been murdered, after all.

Then followed a rustling about in the leaves. It seemed to come nearer, and the boys clasped hands. I am not sure but Rob's impulse would have led him to climb a tree for safety, but his pride would not allow him to make the suggestion first.

They sat there in silence, listening. Somehow Rob seemed to feel that the world was very wide and full of dangers, and He who held it in the hollow of his hand was the only sure refuge and safeguard. He thought of the sleepy, cowardly prayer that he had said, and his head sank in shame.

"It's coming nearer," Dick whispered. "Had we not better wake Charlie?"

There was a sort of snuffle, a crunch of something, and then an unmistakable piggish grunt!

Rob was first to recover, and in spite of a lingering fear that it might be some sort of feint, his laugh rang out clear and free, and Dick joined him.

His porcine majesty came nearer, and favored them with another grunt.

"O, I know!" said Rob. "He's looking for acorns. But he might have more manners than to get up in the middle of the night and disturb his betters!"

"It must be almost morning. There's a light streak through the trees."

"Sure enough."

The noise had roused Charlie, and he started up, rubbing his limbs, and inquiring into the matter.

Dick told the story with embellishments. Piggy still grunted, but did not venture very near.

The day began to dawn. A wood-robin took up the chant of morning, and one voice and another joined in it. They could distinguish different objects, so they washed their hands and faces in the brook and discussed their journey once more.

"The sun is about rising. Rob, here is the east, and we can't be very far from the river!"

"Well, we will try it again."

So they sat there watching the glorious dawn, none the worse for their adventure. As soon as they could see they left their encampment with its heap of ashes and blackened brands, and piggy rooting about for acorns or last year's chestnuts. They did not feel so very brisk at first, but they grew more "limber" as they went on their cheerful way. Yes, here was the river.

"I thought this was right last night," Rob said, with a little triumph.

"And I was wrong," admitted Charlie, frankly.

"Never mind, old fellow, it was an afternoon of mistakes. I dare say I made the first one, — it's like my luck," Rob replied, with unwonted generosity.

They looked up the stream and could distinguish the distant boat. "If we could only make them see us," Charlie said.

They trudged on, however, though the walk was a long one. Rob tied his handkerchief to a slender sapling and signalled now and then, but it seemed as if no one was astir.

In spite of Mr. Meredith's cool way of taking it, there had been more than one anxious heart on board the Pilgrim. Aunt Ruth feared an accident had happened with the gun, and Jessie would have conjured up fifty frightful things if Mr. Meredith had not nipped every one in the bud with a laugh. But they overslept themselves at the last.

"Hooray!" exclaimed Levi, as he was washing up the deck. "There's some sort o' signal down below. Bring your glass, cap'n."

Captain Watson descried the three boys, and weighed anchor immediately.

"What, now, shipmate?" Mr. Conover sang out, as he peered through the tiny window.

"Why, we're under headway, that's all. A fine stiff breeze too."

"But the boys?"

"O, the boys will come to light. Boys, like cats, have nine lives."

Mr. Conover hurried on his clothes, but the unseemly haste was soon explained. There were the truants waiting at the shore-edge.

Levi went out in the little boat after them. The ladies, hearing the commotion, were rising, but Kathie alone had her toilet completed when she heard a joyful shout in Rob's voice.

"O," she exclaimed, rushing on deck, "the boys have come!"

There they were, as bright as you please, with the appetites of hungry bears.

"So you've had a night in the woods, with no girls to bother you, Rob," said his uncle, gayly.

"And it was n't so bad either, since we found our way back by breakfast-time."

"I am glad that you met with no accident."

"We were actually lost," exclaimed Dick, "and our usually reliable brains turned upside-down. Each one had a way to suggest, and each way was

wrong ; but this morning we found a path out without difficulty, after a refreshing night's sleep in the woods. And, Kathie, we have an adventure for you."

Rob colored, and they all laughed.

"No partiality," declared Mr. Meredith.

Kathie was delighted to see them, and asked a multitude of questions. The captain said they deserved a rope's-end, but there was a gleam of fun in his eye. The ladies came up, the welcomes grew warmer, and altogether the return made a merry time.

"We have fish enough for breakfast," said Mrs. Havens, smilingly. "Boys, we missed you out of the dish, and I felt half inclined to throw up the cook's position out of pure grief."

Dick assured her that such a step would be unnecessary now. Charlie told them about the supper and the bed they had improvised.

"But there's some fun behind it all," was Kathie's shrewd guess.

After the breakfast things were cleared away, they all went on deck under the awning, and Kathie begged to hear the adventure.

“Rob, you will have to tell the first part, but I want to finish. I am afraid that you won’t do it justice,” said Dick.

Dick’s part was by far the most graphic. He even excited the male portion of the audience in the skilful manner in which he aroused their fears, and when he had their complete attention he made a long pause at the most interesting point.

“Oh!” said Kathie, with dilated eyes, “what *did* he do? What was it?”

“Why, he did just this”; and Dick mimicked the sound to the life.

“O, it was n’t —” and Miss Jessie paused.

“Yes, a stray pig which was lost in the woods!”

They all laughed heartily.

“Why, that’s no adventure at all,” said Kathie, with some disappointment.

“It was enough for us, — was n’t it, Rob?”

The three boys confessed themselves very well satisfied with their night in the woods.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST OF THE SUMMER.

THEY had a delightful day on the river, and passed lovely little pictures, framed in by green hills, villages, meadow-lands, — haunts that might still be the home of wood-nymphs wild. They fished a little, and the captain knew of a bed of clams in a kind of bay that ran up into the land; so they stopped and dug some, and had an elegant clam-roast. Kathie thought she had never tasted any so deliciously sweet. The boys went off on a short hunting expedition, — Rob proud to be trusted alone with his uncle's gun, — and this time they did not get lost; but they were glad to turn in early, and have a good night's sleep, while their elders sat on deck in the moonlight.

“To-morrow, about noon, we shall reach Thoresby Furnace,” said Captain Watson.

“That is our farthest point down. I want the children to see it at night; but that will only give

us Friday and Saturday in which to return. Pretty close work."

"I guess we can do it, though, Mr. Conover; we shall not have so many breaks coming back."

"O no."

Aunt Ruth stood the voyage beautifully. She was growing real strong again, and every day gave thanks for her recovery. To Kathie it seemed an absolute miracle. She and Miss Jessie were having a most delightful time. In truth, it was a very pleasant party. Grave and quiet Charlie toned Rob's boisterousness, while Dick stood between the two, as it were, full of fun, yet refined and gentlemanly. They all liked him very much.

They spent the next morning in concocting various messes, and having any quantity of amusement. Mr. Meredith made his chowder, though he declared he had none of the right materials. Kathie said he put in it a pinch of this and a pinch of that, and stirred it with a stick of cinnamon, like the old woman's pudding. Mr. Langdon told her that he was making turtle-soup without the turtle. Uncle Robert gave his dish a Chinese name; and the boys declared that they could not tell which was the best. They ate

and laughed, until Rob insisted that he could sit up no longer ; so he took a snooze in the cabin.

It was three when they arrived at Thoresby Furnace, — a dreary - looking place, situated between two hills, high enough ; a regular iron - district, with mines, smelting - furnaces, and rolling - mills. The houses were low, many of them unpainted and dingy in appearance, while the very air seemed full of grayish dust and soot. Squads of uncombed and barefooted children ran about, and the women were gaunt and untidy. The men were stalwart and sinewy, with great brawny muscles and fierce eyes, that looked all the more weird set in these dust-grimed faces.

First, they took a walk around the mines. The whitish - gray masses of every shape, just as they were broken and detached from their native bed, were scattered in every direction, and gleaming with bits of other substances. In one direction the lode was quite deep, and they descended the shaft.

The boys enjoyed groping about by the rays of the lantern, but Kathie and Miss Jessie were not quite so fond of stumbling around in this semi-darkness. Dick and Rob had quite a conversation with a group of miners. Both boys felt quite proud of their small

smattering of mineralogy, and gathered sundry specimens that were quite curiosities on account of their peculiar connection with foreign bodies.

They were all wonderfully entertained by several experiments with a loadstone, and could have whiled away a whole day in peering about and stumbling upon discoveries.

So they came out to daylight again and stared at each other in a surprised fashion, as if there had been some danger of their turning black by their stay underground.

"It is quite refreshing to get into the upper world once more," Miss Jessie said, but the boys cast lingering glances behind.

The furnaces quite surprised Kathie, who concluded that they bore an extremely limited resemblance to their kitchen namesake.

"But they're made to cook iron, that's the difference," explained Rob.

And cooking iron was certainly no trifle. They entered the low doorway of one furnace, and the heat seemed stifling.

"I don't see how any one can endure it," Miss Jessie said.

"The men get used to it," was Mr. Meredith's laughing reply, "just as eels do to skinning. Tending the furnace is nothing to the rolling-mill, however."

They inspected the great masses of iron of almost every conceivable shape, and the quantities of refuse matter. One furnace was being cleaned out and repaired, and they had an opportunity for inspection. The boys were very much interested, and plied the keeper with numerous questions.

They went to the rather shabby hotel for their supper, but the landlady, a woman of low Dutch extraction, was jolly and clever, and a most excellent cook. Such delicious biscuits would have been hard to find, and the broiled chicken was perfection, to say nothing of the generous pieces of blueberry-pie.

In the evening they inspected a rolling-mill under full blast. Here the heat was unendurable, and they rushed to the windows for a breath of air. From one kettle the men were filling moulds, dipping the fiery liquid that hissed and seethed as it touched the mould, and writhed along like a glaring serpent. It fairly made Kathie shiver.

In another apartment they were making great

sheets. The noise and clamor were enough to deafen one, and the men looked frightful in the blazing light that quivered around them like an atmosphere from another world.

The beauty of all, the girls thought, was the blaze that rushed out of the great chimney and made a scarlet daylight against the sky, radiating molten stars in every direction. It was like the most brilliant of fireworks, and, standing out in the cool air, they all enjoyed the sight wonderfully.

"If you have a mind to get back to the boat now, wind and tide are in our favor," said Captain Watson.

"But it does n't seem just right to make you work night and day," interposed Mr. Langdon. "Let us take a turn, the night is so pleasant."

"O, Levi and I won't mind for a while. The Pilgrim scuds along like a bird in a fair breeze."

So they bade Thoresby Furnace good by, and at ten embarked on their return voyage.

"To-morrow will be Friday," said Rob. "The week's twice too short."

"And yet it seems a long while since we started," Kathie replied. "I quite want to see mamma and Freddy."

"I wish we were out for a month instead."

They were not sleepy, so they all sat on deck and sang and talked until nearly midnight. Then Mr. Langdon and Uncle Robert took the Pilgrim in charge, and the rest turned in, as Dick and Rob would have it.

It was clear enough when they went to bed, but though they slept past sunrise no sun came to waken them. The sky was gray and cloudy, and the wind blew rather chilly, though being northeast it was in their favor.

"O," exclaimed Rob, disappointedly, "we can't do anything at all to-day; it's going to rain!"

"There'll be a storm," announced Levi, solemnly. "You need n't be afraid, though,—it ain't nothing like being at sea."

"Ho! afraid on this little river!" was Rob's contemptuous reply. "I wish we were at sea; there'd be some fun in a storm then."

"Not much if you were wet to the skin and had to keep going all the time, and did n't know but the next blow might send you to Davy Jones."

The tide was swift and high, but they could count on that only about an hour, so they crowded all sail

and skimmed along gallantly. By the time breakfast was over a drizzling rain had commenced. It was close and warm in the cabin, so the ladies put on their waterproofs and went up on deck under the awning. The scenery was not deficient in beauty. Over the highest hills hung the gray clouds, while just below, on the very tree-tops it seemed, rested an under-roof of hazy twilight blue, while the far recesses looked dark and mysterious. The fine rain covered the branches almost like frostwork, the willows and alders drooped with their burden of gems, the gray rocks grew soft in outline, and there fell over all a tender hush, a kind of suggestive silence, as if the world waited for something.

Then the tide began to change, but with a good wind they made fair headway until about two, when the breeze died down and it grew very sultry.

"There 'll be a tremendous shower, or I 'm mistaken," said Captain Watson.

"Why?" and Rob glanced around. There were several breaks in the sky which he thought much more indicative of clearing.

"There 's thunder in that cloud down south, and the wind 's shifting a trifle."

Rob looked on with a wise air, but asked, presently, "What are you going to do?"

"Come to anchor. We've been beating about long enough."

This part of it had become rather tiresome, and the rolling motion was not the most delightful in the world. Aunt Ruth had a headache and was lying down, and the rest were quite in want of a new excitement.

Captain Watson watched the cloud. By and by the edge turned a dull indigo, while just underneath there was a curiously light streak.

"It looks almost as if the sun might come out there, if it was the right place for it this time of day," suggested Dick.

"There 'll be another kind of sun," was Levi's grim retort.

Captain Watson steered the boat into a little cove, and he and Levi made all things ready. Rob and Dick were delighted to "lend a hand," as the good-natured captain allowed them to think they were quite serviceable.

A long, low rumble of thunder, and then the clouds came hurrying fast, growing darker and darker. It

almost seemed like night here on the shaded river. Then a spiteful little flash of lightning ran across the sky.

Kathie and Jessie went down to the cabin rather reluctantly, but Charlie, Mr. Meredith, and Uncle Robert followed.

“Why, it’s dark as midnight down here! Let us have a lamp lighted,” said Mr. Meredith.

A sudden gust of wind roared and crashed among the trees. They heard the storm coming on like the tramp of a terrible army. Kathie peered out of the window, making a shelter with her hands, but she could see nothing save in the vivid flashes of lightning.

The rain came on furiously. They heard it on the deck like the beating of hailstones, the trees writhed and twisted, the thunder pealed along in a most terrific fashion.

“Oh!” exclaimed Kathie; “suppose we should be struck!”

“With the thunder?” and Mr. Meredith laughed.

“No, you know I did not mean that!”

“There is not much danger.”

The Pilgrim tugged hard, as if she would fain have

broken from her mooring and breasted the storm in a more courageous fashion. Kathie could not help feeling a trifle timid, and cuddled close to Uncle Robert, starting when some fierce shock seemed to rend the very heavens. Once he bent his head and whispered, "Is not my little girl in God's hands?"

She looked up with a bright smile.

In some fifteen or twenty minutes the shower began to abate, and the thunder rolled along on the other side of the hill. As soon as practicable the boys made a rush down stairs, looking like drowned rats indeed.

"It was just splendid," exclaimed Rob. "There's been a tree struck on the opposite bank. I'll tell you all about it when I get on some dry clothes."

The two boys had enjoyed it very much. Levi was mopping up the deck, and they soon marched out, glad to leave the close cabin, now opened in every direction for air. Hosts of clouds were still scudding along, some black and angry-looking, but in the west there was a bright streak with a suggestion of blue. The wind still moaned among the trees that shook showers from their branches, and the river dashed along in quite a commotion.

"Where is the tree?" asked Miss Jessie.

"Over there. It was a great oak, but did n't it come down with a crash! The wind twisted the limbs about as if they were the merest twigs."

Half of the tree had been split down and was lying partly over the river's edge. A blackened streak seemed to have been ploughed down the fresh trunk, splintering it savagely.

"That 's pretty close," said Mr. Meredith, gravely.

"If it had been our boat!" Kathie whispered just above her breath.

"My dear child, thank God that it was not."

"It rather made a fellow shake in his shoes," said Rob. "It was like a ball of fire for an instant, — enough to blind you; but, before you could think, it was all over. Yes, I 'm glad that it was not us."

They all felt that they had been very near a great danger. The boys' description was extremely entertaining, however, — better than seeing it, Kathie thought.

The wind freshened, and the sails were hoisted once more. It had been rather damp and chilly in the morning and sultry at noon, but now the air was delightful.

"It's best to make all we can," said Captain Watson. There was no knowing what might happen to them to-morrow.

They sat in a little group that night, and the elders told over the most remarkable storms that they had met with. The captain had not spent all his life on a quiet river, yet his had not been quite as wide a world as Mr. Conover's, and he listened with much interest to an account of some of the wild tropical storms. Mr. Meredith had been off the coast of Norway and seen the Maelstrom, which was quite a wonder to his young hearers.

The moon was shining brightly when they separated for the night.

"Only one more day," sighed Rob.

"It seems odd to think that we shall be at home to-morrow night," said Miss Jessie, "when this quiet river really appears miles and miles away from Brookside."

Kathie could hardly realize it either. It was like being out of the world in some enchanted realm.

They went along beautifully until nearly noon of the next day, when they were again becalmed. The sails hung idly, the boat merely rocked, and with

tacking under every guise made very little headway. The tide was running out strongly.

“We might stop in the woods and have one more dinner,” suggested Mr. Meredith. “The tramp will do us good, and we’ll get in by eight. The last train leaves then, I believe.”

It was so very warm in this broiling August sun that his proposal was hailed joyfully. And just on the bank was a shady, inviting spot, so they were soon ashore.

The boys clamored for a short hunting expedition, and in an unused meadow beyond the girls found some berries, so they had quite a gay time. The game was rather scarce, however, so the meal was an exceedingly rural one.

“Here’s to another pleasant tour some time!” said Mr. Langdon, raising his glass. “Although it is only water, it may be as productive of success.”

“O, a speech!” exclaimed Rob. “Some one ought to make a speech. Mr. Meredith!”

Mr. Meredith rose and improved the occasion in a most felicitous manner. The boys gave him three hearty cheers.

“Now, Rob, it’s your turn,” declared his uncle.

"We ought to hear something from you boys."

But Rob was seized with a sudden fit of modesty. Dick Grayson answered on behalf of his comrades, thanking the gentlemen for their care and kindness, and the ladies for their trouble, their good-humor and courage, and, above all, for their cooking!"

"O Dick, you 're a true man!" exclaimed Miss Jessie, with a laugh. "That's the royal road to their hearts, I believe."

"Now we ought to have a song," said Mrs. Havens.

They made the woods ring with their choruses. Last of all they tried "Auld Lang Syne." Two voices trembled a little in this verse:—

"We twa hae paddled i' the burn,
Frae morning sun till dine,
The seas between us braid hae roared,
Sin auld lang syne."

And, glancing at those happy youthful faces, the wonder came, as it always does to older hearts, where their lot would be cast, and their wanderings end. In the Great City, eternal in the heavens, at last, Uncle Robert softly prayed.

Then they picked up their few traps and marched

down to the shore. Kathie gathered a stray fern or two. She and Miss Jessie had quite filled their portfolios with various leaves and flowers as reminders of the pleasant tour.

“Farewell, ye woods!” exclaimed Rob, waving his hand tragically.

“But not ye waters!” added Dick, with a laugh.

“With a fair wind we should soon touch Croftsbury,” said Captain Watson; “but this will be slow work.”

Slow enough surely. Dick and Rob proposed fishing as an expedient to while away the time. Mrs. Havens and Mr. Conover packed again, and made everything ready for a speedy going ashore when the port was reached.

The sky had hazed over, and the sun gone under a cloud, so it was very pleasant sitting on deck. Mr. Meredith read aloud *The Ancient Mariner*, in his clear, flexible voice, and they were almost as idle as —

“ a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.”

“We shall have to wait for the last train surely,” said Mr. Conover.

Captain Watson crowded all sail and strained every nerve to catch the faintest breath of air by most ingenious tacking. Presently they came in sight of the chimney-tops; and the irregular little town looked odd, it must be confessed, after a week spent with nature.

About half past six they were in. A man was found to take the luggage to the station, and they all bade Captain Watson and Levi a hearty good-by, expressing their delight at the whole trip and their obligations for his kindness.

"It 's been quite a treat to me as well," he replied. "Here 's success to the longer voyage, young gentlemen! May you have few storms and a fair wind!"

They thanked him cordially.

Mr. Conover proposed that they should go to the hotel and have some supper, but the ladies concluded they looked quite too much like newly landed emigrants. Mr. Meredith found some peaches for them, and they whiled away the time until the train came along.

The days were shortening already, and by the time they reached Brookside it was dark enough, as the night had set in cloudy.

"It would be no joke to walk home," exclaimed Rob; "and I believe there's nothing here that a benighted traveller can comfort himself with."

There were but few passengers beside them in this train. Not a hack or vehicle within sight, sure enough.

"Charlie and I could do very well," said Miss Jessie.

"We're all going to report at head-quarters first," declared Mr. Meredith, very positively.

There was a rumbling of wheels, and in a moment Hugh had turned the corner with the ponies and the family carriage. The ladies were stowed in, and the rest held a consultation. Dick was quite sure that he could get a team; and so he did, the rest following suit soon after.

Mrs. Alston had gone over at five, and then given up the travellers. Not so Hannah, who had cooked a bountiful supper, and was still keeping it warm.

A great shout announced their arrival, and Mrs. Alston hurried out.

"Here we are all, mamma, safe and sound!" exclaimed Kathie, joyously, as she sprang to her mother's arms.

There was a great time as they marched into the

library, — a very fair looking company indeed, a little burned by sun and wind, but rosy, well, and brimful of happiness.

“The most splendid time in the world!” declared Rob.

The party would have dispersed immediately, but Mrs. Alston insisted upon their having some supper. They all declared they were not a bit hungry, but Hannah's savory preparations were too tempting to be long resisted. Then Dick and Mr. Langdon took their departure, echoing Rob's verdict that it had been a splendid time.

They would fain have kept Miss Jessie, but she declared that she had nothing to wear on Sunday, and that she knew the family would be anxious; so, after half a dozen good-bys, she and Charlie drove off, Mr. Meredith accompanying them.

It was midnight before they were in bed at Cedarwood. Kathie had become so accustomed to the rolling motion of the boat that it seemed at first as if she should never go to sleep, and this great wide bed was so different from her little berth on board the Pilgrim.

They were none the worse for their journey on the

following morning, though Aunt Ruth was rather weary. Kathie could n't help thinking of the Ancient Mariner and his feelings when he first saw the lighthouse top and the kirk of his own countree. She did indeed give humble and hearty thanks for the watchful care that had protected her on every hand, and filled her life so full of pleasures.

Rob found himself quite a hero in Brookside, to his great satisfaction. He had been out in a yacht for a whole week, lost in the woods one night, had hunted, fished, seen the furnaces at Thoresby and explored an iron-mine. There was enough to talk about until school commenced.

Still, he came back to his old love, the Jessie, with a very loyal heart. His nautical phrases were quite the admiration of the boys, and he was more than proud to take the lead in firing at a mark. Uncle Robert explained to his mother that he had become something of an expert with a gun, and, though she still had a little womanly fear about it, she said nothing.

They were very sorry to part with Mrs. Havens, and Mr. Meredith declared that he must take a run to the city, but that he would promise to spend a

week with them before the pleasant weather ended. He seemed quite like a second uncle to the children, who grew daily more fond of him.

Kathie went back to her gardening and her music. The bed of heliotrope was still in full glory, and the pansies grew larger and more velvety, if such a thing could be. The vases were filled constantly, and the house was delicately fragrant. More than one invalid in the town smiled gratefully over Kathie's gift of flowers.

Of all who had welcomed Kathie, Gypsy was not last or least. He seemed fairly wild with joy.

"Poor fellow ! Did you miss me much ?" asked Kathie.

"I think he did," answered her mother, "though he has been very gay and cheerful, but I did not dare let him out. Some days he would call in such a cunning fashion, and seemed to wait for a reply, looking all round with his sharp black eyes."

"He's a darling" ; and Kathie kissed him with the utmost tenderness, while he gave her a sly wink.

Freddy wanted to hear all about the sail over and over again, and his attention seemed to be divided between that and the mystery of jackstones that he

was trying to master; but his brain was apt to get confused between "ravelly ones and twos," "peas in the pot," "horse in the stable," and "riding the elephant," and Uncle Robert's pound bade fair to gain pebbles enough for a secure foundation.

There were several earnest discussions about schools during these days. Uncle Robert took a journey to examine into the merit of two or three, but his nephew preserved a happy indifference. A new school for girls was to be started at Brookside by a young widow lady, sister of one of the clergymen of the place. Her circulars were sent round soliciting scholars among the wealthier families.

"Did you put down Kathie's name?" asked her uncle.

"No," replied Mrs. Alston, "but I thought of it."

"O, don't send me," said Kathie, pleadingly, and she twined her arms around her uncle's neck.

"Why, birdie?"

"Because I don't want to go."

"Not a very logical reason"; and he laughed.

"I can study just as well at home, and you are the darlinest teacher in the world."

"And what else?"

"I like it," in her pretty, arch way.

"I will give you mine. I think children need each other's society, and not only the incentive but the discipline of school and regular habits of study. You have done very well this year, all interruptions being considered."

"But I'll try my very best," she said, coaxingly.

"To like school?"

She shook her head with slow, dainty wilfulness.

"Not if I wished it?"

That sobered her, but still she was silent.

Uncle Robert took the sweet little face in his hands and looked steadily into the lustrous eyes. She saw that he was in earnest.

"Yes," she said, choking down the remembrance of happy dreams.

Her reward was a tender kiss.

She wandered about the garden afterward, and could not help shedding a few tears. This free life had been so gay and pleasant, and the restraint of a strange school did not look at all attractive. It was her duty, however, to make herself content.

There was Gypsy asleep on a branch of honey-

suckle, and though he opened his eyes at her call, he did not answer. She took him carefully down, and, as it was near night, carried him into the house, but he did not seem very lively.

"Perhaps it is because I am dull myself," she thought, as she shut the cage door; so she tried her best to be cheerful, but he curled himself into a ball and was silent.

Alas, dear, charming little Gypsy! Not hearing any welcome the next morning she ran to the cage. Gypsy was down on the floor by his drinking-glass, his feathers sadly limp and ruffled, and his eyes with a strange filmy look in them. She took him in her hand and ran to Uncle Robert.

"O," she exclaimed, in a frightened voice, "something is the matter with my darling Gypsy! Do look at him!"

Gypsy gave his legs a convulsive twitch and partially opened his eyes.

"Birdie! Gypsy! don't you know me?" she cried, in distress.

The little thing roused himself and tried to rise. He looked almost as if he smiled, then a shiver ran through his tiny frame.

"He must be very sick," said Uncle Robert, gravely.

"O, what can we do for him?"

As she spoke she pressed him against her cheek and kissed his soft yellow feathers. His little heart beat very faintly indeed, and his legs were cold.

"Let us take him to the kitchen. Rob, run up to Aunt Ruth and ask for a piece of soft flannel. We'll get him warm, and there are several remedies to give birds. Was he well yesterday?"

Kathie remembered that he had not been quite as bright as usual toward night. Uncle Robert took him.

"O Kathie!" he exclaimed, suddenly, "I am afraid that he *is* dying?"

Kathie uttered a cry. Gypsy raised his head at the sound of the sweet, familiar voice, tender even in anguish, his eyes fluttered wearily, his head dropped.

Kathie glanced at Uncle Robert, but his face was very sad. Then she laid her own in his hands, and wept tears of bitter sorrow and longing for her bird.

Aunt Ruth returned with Rob. All that was left

of restless, dancing Gypsy was a little ball of feathers. The brilliant song was hushed forever, the glancing wings were stiffened, and the bright eyes had looked their last. Dear wise little Gypsy, with an almost human soul, will not the fadeless groves of the other country be brighter for such as you?

"It seems as if he ought to go to heaven," said Kathie between her sobs. We all want an immortality for the objects of our love in the first deep pang of sorrow.

There was a sad, sad household that day. Uncle Robert tried to comfort Kathie, and in the afternoon Miss Jessie came over.

"I'll send you another bird," she said, soothingly.

"O Miss Jessie, I believe I don't want another. There never could be one so sweet and cunning again, and it would only make my heart ache thinking of him."

Rob made a little coffin, and they buried it just at sunset under a beautiful white rosebush, where he had swung in the summer air many a time, and talked perhaps with the roses.

"It is the last day of summer," Uncle Robert said, slowly, as they walked back to the house.

Kathie climbed on his knee as he seated himself in the porch, and, burying her face on his shoulder, cried softly. Yes, the bright, beautiful summer was gone. Could there ever be another like it?

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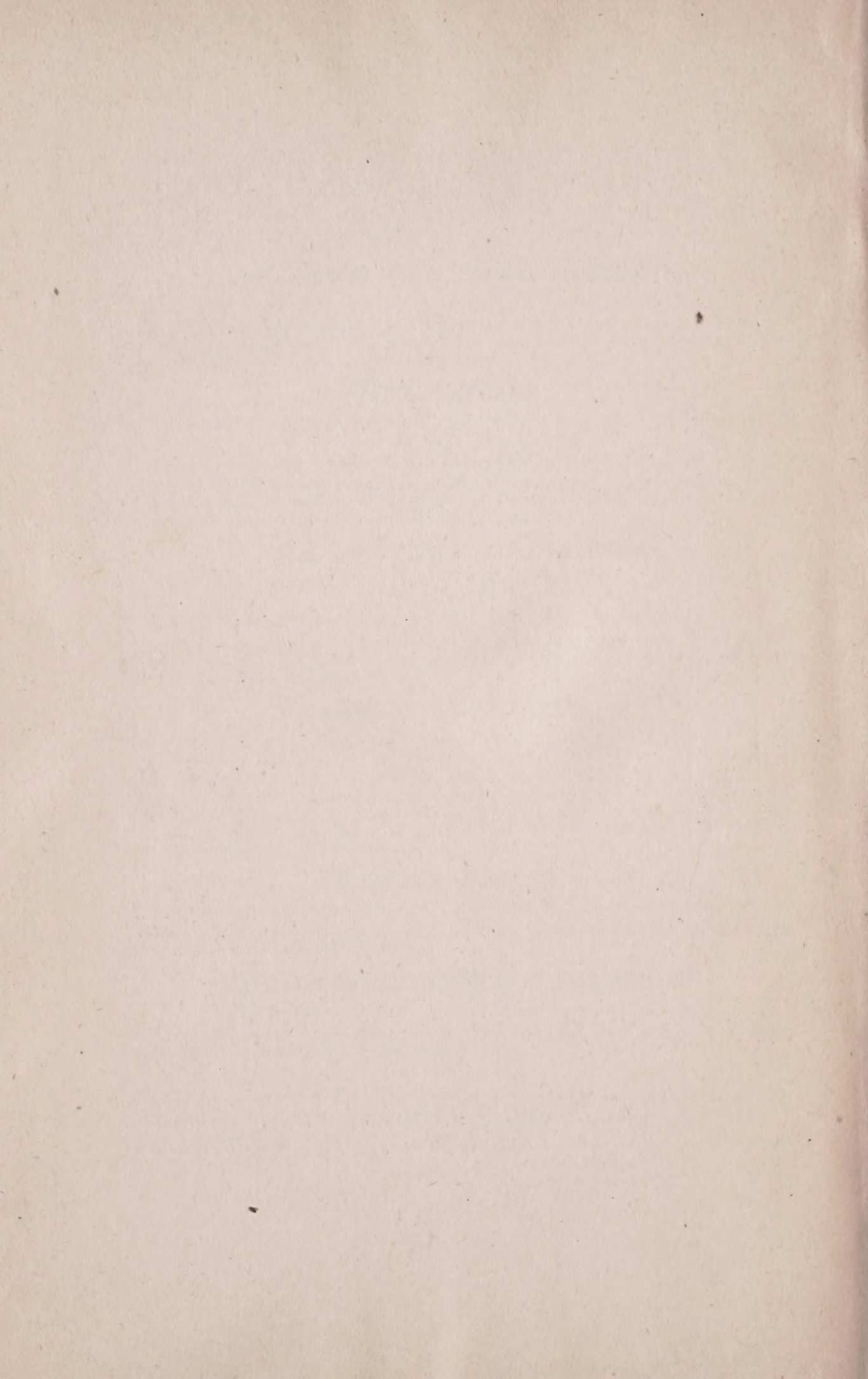
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